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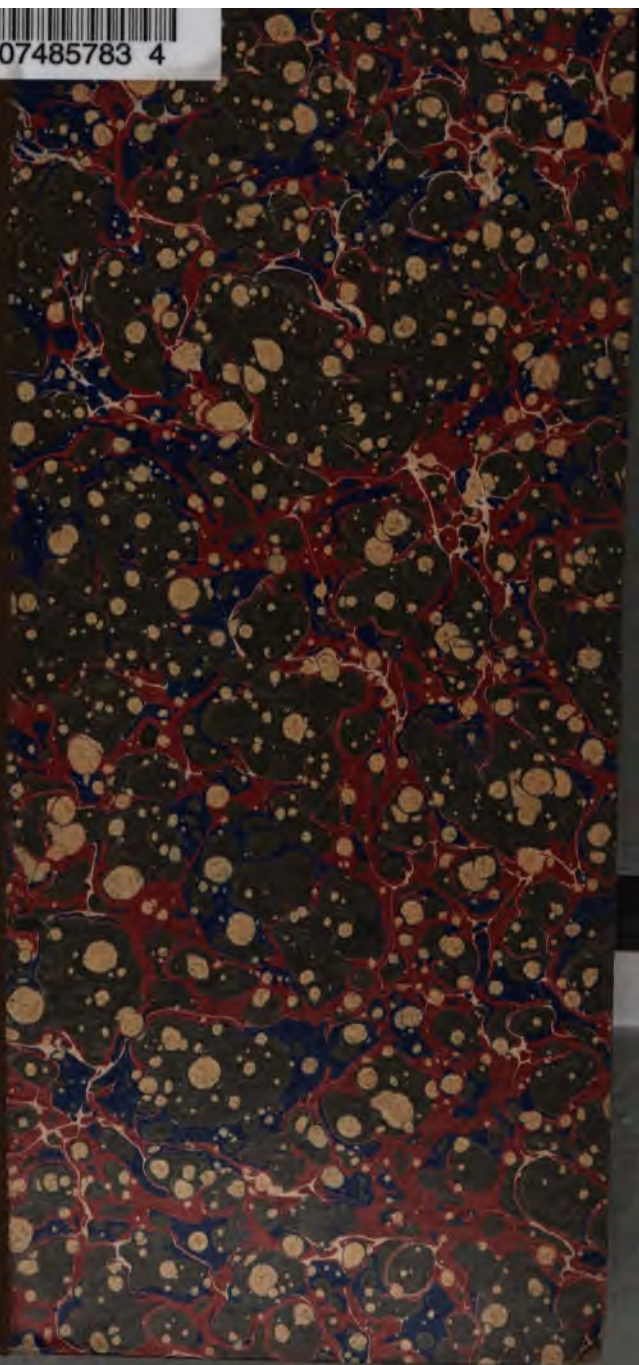
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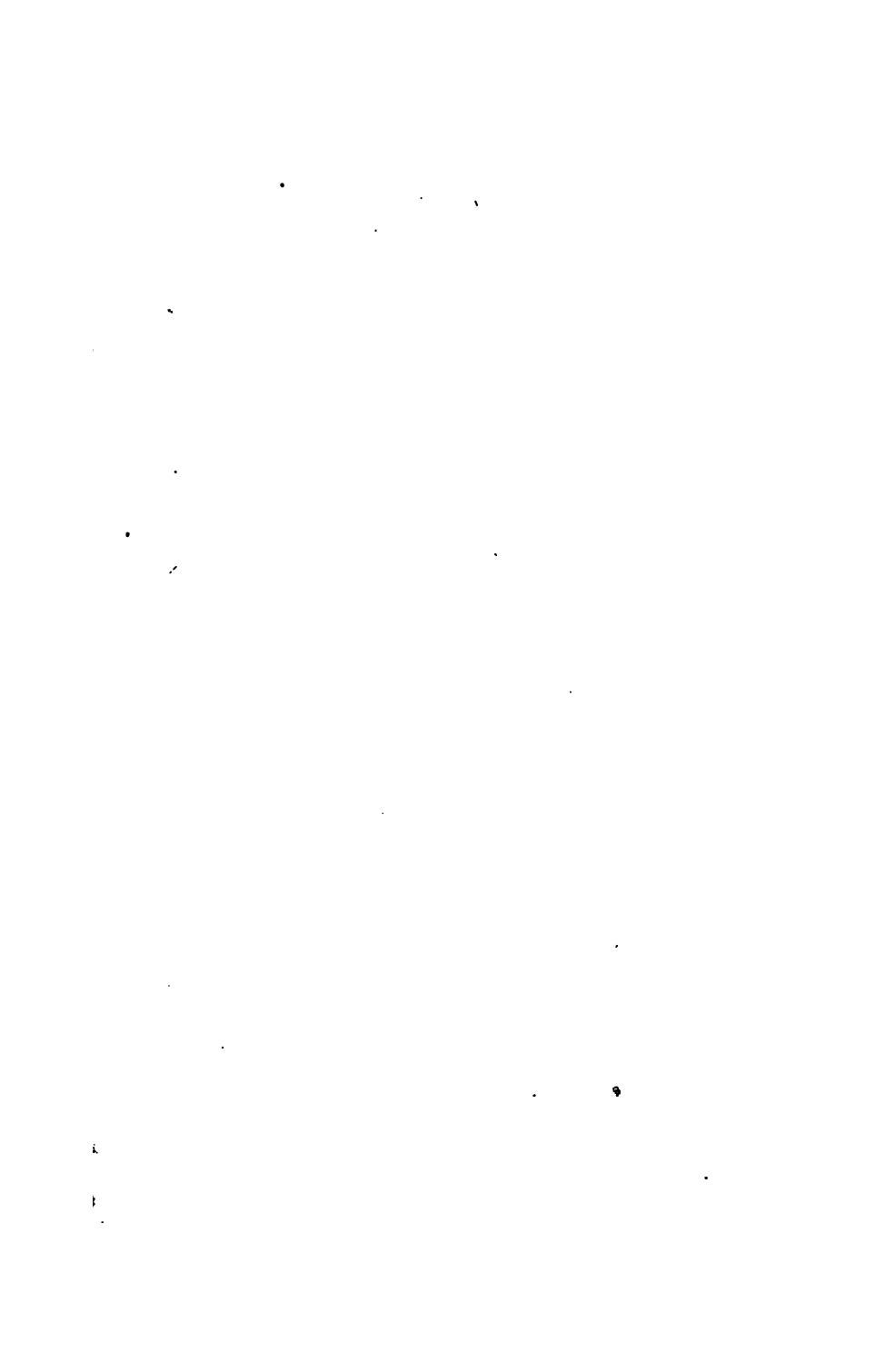
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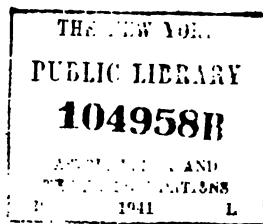
JESSOP BLYTHE

A NOVEL

BY JOSEPH HATTON, AUTHOR
OF "BY ORDER OF THE CZAR,"
"UNDER THE GREAT SEAL,"
"CIGARETTE PAPERS," ETC.



J. B. LIPPINCOTT COMPANY
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THE BANISHMENT OF JESSOP BLYTHE.

CHAPTER I.

GOD'S FACTORY.

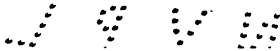
THEY were a company of English rope-makers. For two hundred years they and their ancestors had been tenants under the Dukes of Devonshire. In this current year of grace the toilers occupy the building in which their forefathers worked, and on the same easy terms. They pay no rent, nor ever did. Yet they possess the most wonderful house of labour in the world. It is the entrance to what is known to topography as the Devil's Hole; but if ever building gave special evidence of the Divine hand it is to be seen in the great cavern of the High Peak of Derbyshire. It has a dome and a nave that dwarf St. Peter's and St Paul's. The ropers' drum and wheels and flying yarn make a music of their own. It is as if the men and women gave tunes to the cordage which they spin. The strings of the industrial harp are many and various. Once in a way a woman's voice rises above the buzz of the rotating yarn, and the chorus breaks the monotony of the daily toil. This is generally a jubilate in which the younger voices fling out the refrain with open throats—"Happy Land! Happy Land. What e'er my fate in life may be; Still again, still again, my heart shall cling to Thee!"

And this was their happy land, this Cave of the Peak

on the outskirts of the picturesque village of Castleton. Human fancy could hardly conceive for this unconscious worship a more impressive temple in which the Divine edict should be fulfilled, "In the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat bread."

It may be said without hyperbole that this house of toil is frescoed by the Almighty. For countless ages His journeyman Time has been at work decorating the massive walls and dome. Thousands of years before the arts of Greece and Rome, centuries anterior to the rise of civilisation in Central Africa, when Egyptian architecture was only a suggestion in its palm trees, and the artist had not yet been born to translate its lotus flower into decorative design, this factory in the Peak was graven, painted, carved, stencilled, inlaid, embossed and otherwise beautified by the tireless Master who still adds daily touches to the greys and greens, the blues and yellows and neutral tints that make up the general tone of the massive limestone that was ancient when Noah was a boy. The floor is solid with the débris of the newly-created world.

In this Temple that dominates the Cavern of the Peak the rope-makers of Cavedale, men and women, girls and boys, work and live together as a model Socialistic community, but without the noisy *réclame* of a cheap democracy. They fulfil their daily duties quietly and in peace under the unwritten laws of a united family. The Throne is their ground landlord, and ever since there were Dukes of Devonshire, and in the old time before them, the Cavendishes have been the leaseholders. These rope-makers of Cavedale, in the parish of Castleton, have seven masters. When one dies or is thrown out (an exceptional incident, which forms one of the chief motives of this present history) the eldest son of the family takes his place. If there is no son then the oldest workman of the dead master succeeds. There are to this day some two or three score persons employed under these seven families. Five of the masters belong to one family; two to another. It is a very close borough, and picturesque as it is close. Strangers who



have observed in books of travels pictures of the High Peak cavern are inclined to wonder what the weird galls-like uprights and posts are, with flying ropes and hanging weights, with suggestions of vast wheels beyond and curious figures standing out against the darkness. This is the ropery. Each master has his walk. Seven rope-walks traverse this stupendous excavation which is the hallway of the so-called Devil's Hole, with its headings and subways, its halls of Eblis and its dripping wells, its underground rivers and its other mysteries beyond. These are things that do not concern the ropers much. In the old days there were ghosts in the cave, but the ropers were hardy folk and they had their free possession to maintain, so they paid no heed to ghosts nor took any account of the shadowy men in armour who were said to appear in the grounds of Peveril's Castle immediately above them.

Less than half a century ago the ropers not only worked here, but they lived in the factory, built themselves huts, and one, more enterprising than the rest and of a wider ambition, erected a stable. In those days the cavern presented a more curious appearance than it does now, although there is still a small building on one side of the ropery which is used as an office by the guide who introduces visitors to the wonders of the ultimate cavern, and for whose behests a pathway has been railed off from the manufactory.

Mr. Ruskin probably never saw this High Peak house of labour. Otherwise the world would have heard something of it, since the recluse of the Lakes loves hand-made things, and delights in the primitive, the lowly, and the natural. The ropers of the Peak, who pay no rent and work in a factory made by God, spin and weave in the old Egyptian way. Their ropes and twine, their halters and clothes-lines, their whipcord and cables, are all made by hand. Their factory has no doors. It is open to sun and shadow, to summer winds and winter blasts, and the ropers work there right through the year. It is a sheltered site. You arrive at it through a valley which is made musical by the

brook that is born in the cavern, and which now and then becomes a torrent, angry, yellow, opaque, terrible.

At these times you know that the mighty cavern is in possession of the waters that are beneath the earth, that no living thing exists from end to end, though the torrent finds an exit that makes no claim upon God's factory, which remains calm and still except for the whirr of the ropers' wheels or the chatter of men and women at their work. Not that, talk loud as they may, their voices make much sound. What would in a smaller place, or one confined with doors, be a great din, is as nothing in this mighty factory, which from the furthest end appears to be lighted by a heaven-made window always clear and pure.

As the floor dips at its further end the central opening is somewhat dwarfed, and has the remarkable effect of a mighty window which, as you approach it, opens out, and finally gives upon the footpath in Cavedale, whence you see the great limestone front rising up sheer to the sky, with lichens and stray flowers upon its wrinkled face, and here and there a wild bird sweeping athwart the iron-grey rock and disappearing into the heavens above.

It was at this untaxed factory of freemen that Jessop Blythe was haled before his peers to suffer the penalty of the drone. For masters and men, labour and obedience was the legacy of God's factory. In the most democratic of Socialistic communities labour is a condition of existence. When the ideal Commonwealth is started there will be much more casting out of the lazy and dissolute than is dreamed of by the open-mouthed idlers who drink in the sophistries of long-haired and long-headed agitators in London, Chicago, and Paris.

Jessop Blythe had worked in the community since boyhood. Always a truant and a laggard, he had over and over again broken the unwritten laws of the masters of Cavedale. Latterly he had taken to drink, and he was untrue to the best interests of his fellows. He had undersold them in the markets. He had reviled their occupation. He worked only by fits and starts, and had generally drifted

to the bad. The masters were loth to move against him ; but at last their patience was exhausted, and discipline demanded that he should be cast out from the hive.

Fortunately for Jessop, he had a hard-working mother. She had succeeded to the business of her husband, who was a lapidary. Zodack Bradford was her foreman. He had held a similar position with her husband. Zodack was what Derbyshire people call "a character." Everybody is "a character" in the Peak country who is not of the common and regular pattern of humanity. Zodack in his way was a man of phrases. He shot his controversial opponents down with a queer saying or a rough epigram. He was also the cleverest lapidary in all the county. Old Blythe had put his son Jessop to the rope-making. The lad did not frame well for the cutting, engraving, or polishing of stones. He was a dull-mettled lad, and there was an opening in the rope-walk which in due course led to Jessop taking a master's place in lieu of the ordinary succession.

On becoming one of the seven masters, Jessop Blythe had married a Tideswell girl, and from the day when he stood at the altar and swore to love and cherish her he had taken to drink with a regularity and persistence that, devoted to his proper calling, would have led to prosperity. Jessop had always been fond of a glass and a bit of company. He was popular at the alehouse, and the delight of Saturday night smoke-rooms, because he could sing a good song, and was "as sweet a whistler as ever cocked a lip," to quote the verdict of Castleton, and the old town was fastidious in the matter of music, rejoiced in its Glee Club, and at Christmas-time would give forth its "Hallelujah chorus" from the "Messiah," "Hark, the Herald Angels," and "The Star of Bethlehem," with an energy that was stimulated with mulled ale and rum punch, the recognised order of refreshment for the Waits all round about the regions of the Peak.

When Jessop Blythe was haled before his fellows he had just been made a father. The new-comer was a girl. He

had insisted upon drinking her health with his mid-day meal. Any reason for a drink was a good reason with Jessop. Zodack Bradford said the youngest master roper had in one short year become the oldest waster and vagabond of the lot. Not that Zodack intended to imply that the rope-makers individually or collectively were vagabonds. Zodack was a just man, and knew that the ropers were a law-abiding, sober, honest community ; though once in six months every master made a point of "going on a spree ;" but he combined business with pleasure. Once in six months each roper went forth into the world to sell his goods. There were no middlemen connected with this cordage factory. Each master was his own commercial traveller. Going upon the road twice a year, each man, as a rule, made it a point of honour to enjoy himself ; and it is believed by many that to get drunk once in a way is a very enjoyable, if not indeed a very healthy and wholesome, thing. But the rope-makers would not allow this belief to break down the discipline of the management. Therefore Jessop Blythe had increased the disadvantages under which he laboured as a recalcitrant by being more or less inebriate when, in the middle of tea-time, the men and masters assembled to maintain the validity of their unwritten laws and regulations.

There was a great deal that was good in Jessop Blythe. This may be said of many a worse man. Zodack Bradford declares that nobody is all bad, not even the habitual criminal ; but the good is so difficult to find that it is hardly worth looking for. He was very angry with Jessop, because he liked him, and had seen him grow up. Being none too well off at any time, and living to a great extent on his mother and in her house, Jessop had adopted a son. He did not call him son, but he treated him with paternal consideration. This youngster was a Welsh lad. His name was Lewis Tregarron. He had found his way from Cardigan, in Wales, with his widowed mother, firstly to Cardiff, thence to Liverpool in some small trading vessel, to drift eventually, heaven knows how, to Chesterfield, where the

mother had died in the workhouse. While the Guardians, with a proper regard to the fair distribution of taxes for the poor, were trying to discover the parish to which the orphan was chargeable, Lewis Tregarron, with his high-sounding name, his empty pockets, and his no less empty stomach, set off to seek some more home-like nest for himself than that which presented so hard a front to the far away hills of the Chesterfield workhouse. Lewis Tregarron ran away from the workhouse, and one day, cold, hungry, thin, weird as to his sunken eyes and bony jaws, presented himself before the company of ropers at the entrance to God's factory. He was the most weary, dark-eyed, strange-looking little chap they had ever seen; and Jessop Blythe took compassion upon him and succoured him. He was an intelligent lad, said he was eight years old, was born in Wales, had lived at Cardigan, had neither father nor mother, and was willing to work, but would rather die than go back to the Union, all of which pleased the ropers and won the admiration of Jessop Blythe, who said he'd be hanged if any Union workhouse in the world should compel the lad to swig skilly or break stones so long as he lived. So Tregarron was fed and mended by Jessop's mother, not without much grumbling and protest, and was forthwith taken on at the ropery.

They love to nickname men and things in the Peak. They called Jessop's mother "Stingy Blythe," and for this they, no doubt, had warrant; but they were not always justified in their nicknames, some of which were incongruous as relating to the character nicknamed, and others, when they were not humorous, descended to cynicism. Because the waif Tregarron was thin and odd, and too little to be of any importance, they named him in a grand way "Tregarron, the Welshman," and the oldest master of the ropers, for the reason that he was of a mild and gentle temper, and benevolent and generous to a fault, they called "Billy Nipper."

CHAPTER II.

THEY SPOKE AS ONE MAN.

Now this William Woodruffe, whom Castleton irreverently and inconsequentially called "Billy Nipper," was the mouthpiece of the community of God's factory; and when Tregarron saw the men gather together, the women and boys leave the place, and Senior Master Woodruffe call upon Jessop Blythe to stand forward, he knew that his patron was going to have a bad time. So the lad hid himself behind one of the big drums, with its wreaths of twine, but presently sidled up to Jessop and touched his hand. Jessop looked down upon him and patted his head, as he might have patted a favourite dog, and Tregarron rubbed his head against his knees. A strange, curious, picturesque-looking little chap this waif of a busy world. Great, dark eyes, long black hair, a thin wistful face, long arms, thin legs, dressed in a whitey-brown smock-frock, with a bit of yellow ribbon round his neck for a handkerchief, he looked like a Spanish gipsy or an Italian beggar lad, such as you may see lying on the steps of St. Mark's, in Venice, handsome in his shabby attire, just the kind of mortal that an artist would select for study, but with the something dark and uncanny in his aspect that common people, as a rule, would shut their doors against.

"Now, yo Tregarron, go away," said the Senior Master, as severely as his gentle manner and soft voice would allow; "yo can come back th' minute half-hour's up."

The senior masters stood by one of the great twine drums, and the other masters were gathered round with the men, an earnest-looking lot of fellows, some of them lithe and strong, others old and bent.

Tregarron looked up wistfully at Jessop, who in response stroked the lad's head, but looked away from him.

"Am I to go?"

"Aye, lad, do a' mesters tell yo; they know what's best."

Jessop spoke in a husky voice. There was something tender in his manner that seemed for a moment to trouble the senior master, who fidgeted with the twine that was wound round the great wheel. He was a white-haired man with a grey, straggling beard and calm, restful eyes. He had seen his grandchildren grow up about him men and women, most of them finding occupation in the ropery or at the adjacent lead mines until cheap foreign lead had killed the English market, but some distant railway works had lately given employment to others, and the ropery and the little town of Castleton, hard by the cave, were looking wistfully into a future when the locomotive should steam into the place and drive out the coaches and breaks and hired carriages that still give the village an old-world and cheery bustle of life.

The lad went his way towards the mouth of the great cavernous workshop, looking back now and then, and at last, after standing for a moment like some fantastic figure of romance against the sky-window, disappeared as the Senior Master began to address the comrade who was to be deposed; but not before Jessop Blythe, seeing that Tregarron had gone, flung back his head defiantly and said, "Now, lads, what is it? Out wi' it! Doan't yo think I'm drunk! A chap isna made a fayther ivvery day, so I just had a sup to wet th' bargain. Why, good Lord, how black yo all look! And what's gotten yo, Billy Nipper? Cheer up, Billy——"

"Jessop Blythe," said the Senior Master, breaking in upon Jessop's remarks, "we're glad yo're sober."

"It's a lie; I'm drunk!" retorted Jessop, with a tipsy laugh.

"Drunk or sober," said the Master, without change of tone or manner, "it'll mek no difference to this meetin'. It is no pleasant job we'n gotten to do; but we're going to do it."

"Ole reight, drive on, Billy," said Jessop, with a grin that

was intended to arouse a spirit of levity in the younger men, but it had no effect; they had talked the business of the day over too seriously for that, and in a measure felt themselves engaged in an act of government. The six united masters were their representatives, their tribunes, to whose places and profit, to whose authority they would one day succeed, each going forth twice a year to sell their goods in the towns of Buxton, Derby, Nottingham, and Sheffield, and having the right on those occasions to go on the spree for a day or two just as Billy Nipper himself did twice a year at Buxton, where he had sold his twine ever since he had been a master, now over thirty years.

"I will drive on, Jessop Blythe, and it'll be a drive as yo're not likely to forget."

"Then stir your stumps, Billy," said Jessop, with a sneer. "I doant want to stand here ole day, and what's more I woant."

"The six masters and the men here assembled with sorrow have come to the conclusion that yo're a hindrance to th' work o' th' ropery, and a disgrace to community, and from this day forth, Jessop Blythe, we refuse to work wi' yo, to eat wi' yo, or to consort wi' you; it's felt that it's time we made an example o' you for benefit of th' rest, and for maintainin' th' integrity of Duke's ropery. And we hereby and hereon accordin to our unwritten but inflexible laws cast yo out from among us; yo are no longer master or man in this place, and no longer a comrade of any of us out of it; and that's all there is to say."

"And so say we all!" shouted masters and men, speaking as with one voice.

It was the first time within the memory of the oldest roper that any man had been cast out; but a precedent had been established by the second oldest roper who remembered his grandfather telling of a case in his early days, and so deep an impression had the story made upon the second oldest roper that he had remembered some of the words of the formula of dismissal, more particularly that it was hereby and hereon, and according to our unwritten

and inflexible law that from henceforth we neither work with you, eat with you, nor consort with you, and these words were therefore introduced into the Master's brief judgment and verdict.

Jessop Blythe pulled his frieze jacket about his shoulders, and stood upright, facing his judges. He was a shock-headed, tall young man, loose of limb, with big hands, blue eyes, a large mouth, with the flabby kind of lips that love the bottle; but there was something interesting, not to say pathetic, in the appearance of the outcast roper as he wiped his lips on his sleeve, and stretched himself to his full length.

"So," he said, "that's what it's come to, mates? Well, I dur say yo're reight. Zodack Bradford warned me not long sin, as my brother ropers would shunt me."

Then it seemed as if his loose-jointed limbs would not bear him stiffly up any longer and he shifted his position.

"Zodack's a bit of a wit as yo know, and yo should hev heard him empisise th' word brothers; but there, I doant want no bad blood; I'n long been tired o' this muck hole."

"Stop, Jessop Blythe," said the Master, "yo know what this place means to us and our families; yo know that we doant blaspheme when we call it God's factory. Therefore whatever yo've gotten to say we'll not have th' roof defamed that's sheltered us and ours, and our fathers before us, and been a continual answer to our prayer of give us this day our daily bread."

The ropers remained silent during this dialogue. Some of them were not as enthusiastic about the rope-walk as their spokesman; indeed, several might have been named who would have been glad to go out into the world and work in houses and finished buildings, and in towns and cities; but there was among them a certain kind of patriotic feeling for their untaxed workshop and their unwritten Socialistic laws.

"No offence, Billy," said Jessop, with a smile; "I'd rayther parted wi' yo all over a social glass, but I dur say yo're reight. I doant think I was ivver made for mouldering in

a ropery, or runnin' into useless seed in a one-eyed village like Castleton; I've often longed to be out and away over yonder hills as is always a hedging a chap in, and seemin' to brag that yo conna get out; and now I'll show 'em; my wife and me's nivver gotten on well, and I leave her i' good hands wi' my mother and Zodack Bradford, and she'll hav the youngster as is born to-day to be a soart o' comfort to her; so that's all reight and reglar; and what isn't reight and reglar I'll make reight and reglar."

As Jessop spoke he seemed to be mastering himself. His legs stiffened; his lips were now and then pressed firmly together: he stretched out his arms and flung his head back; he was a sober man.

"Whatever we can do for yo irrespective of the judgment we'n had to pass, and yo must remember, Jessop Blythe, that we've all tried to reform yo; and it seems Zodack Bradford had warned yo——"

"That's ole right," said Jessop, cutting short the Master's apologetic speech, which had excited a stir of satisfaction among the men who hated to see Jessop take the business in so calm and friendly a spirit. It unmanned them. They would have liked him to bully the Master and resist the decree; they wanted something to lean their moral backs against; but here was Jessop making them feel small, not to say sorry by his resignation.

"I say again that's ole reight, dear owd Billy, and may this be last as its first performance o' th' kind, I fancy; but it was this as I wanted to say," and he turned and looked round the factory, fixing his eyes on the bright blue entrance into which the sun was shining, and then with a motion of his right arm in that direction he said, "there's yonder lad Tregarron, as I've brought up this two year sin he were eight and a wanderer on face o' the earth; keep him i' the ropery."

"We will, lad," said several voices; the first time any man had spoken except the Master.

"And mek a law for him—yo can do it sin yo can mek one to turn me out, and I dur say yo're reight; mek it a

law as my place is kept oppen for him ; so as he shall be messter instead o' me ; he'll be man enough for it by he's eighteen—will yo, lads ?”

Master and men turned to their spokesman, who nodded his approval, and the answer came straight from every mouth, “ We will.”

“ That's all I'n gotten to say. Except, good-bye, lads.”

Lying at Jessop's feet was an old grey overcoat, thin with wear, bleached by many a sunrise that had seen him striding up Cavedale to work when he was in good fettle, and which in the factory he used as a cushion for his after-dinner siesta, when he would smoke and talk to the boys about foreign countries and men who made fortunes beyond the seas. Tregarron was wont to be his chief listener on these occasions, and he too would have dreams as his master had of going forth and coming home again, rich and famous.

“ I'll tek t'owd coat wi' me,” he said ; and picking it up he trailed it along as he stalked out towards the calm exit where the sky made a great blue window. The men watched him. Some of them thought he would turn and wave his hand by way of a sort of final farewell. But he went straight away and dropped out of their ken to encounter Sol Tidser, who was known by the gamins of Castleton as “ Owd Wiseacre.” His Christian name was Solomon. His godfathers and godmothers must have suspected that the lad would grow up into anything but a Solomon for wisdom ; hence his name.

Sol Tidser lived with his father and mother in one of the few byeways of the village. They kept a miscellaneous little shop. It was called the broker's, for the reason that Mrs. Tidser attended sales by auction and dealt in second-hand goods. She was a neat little woman, who in the early days of her marriage had left Tidser and gone off with an auctioneer's clerk to Sheffield, but had returnd after a year and was taken back by her husband, who was a paralytic, and many years older than herself. Her conduct ever since had been so exemplary that she had been forgiven by the severest matrons of the village, seeing that old Tid-

ser had become quite helpless, sat in a great arm-chair all day long by the fire, and was assiduously nursed and protected by the poor little woman who had found him hard to bear with when she was young and good-looking. The cottage in which they lived was one of four or five rooms. The front one was the shop. It was always tidy whatever kind of miscellaneous rubbish Mrs. Tidser managed to accumulate there. At the back of the shop was the living room. Here all day and all night slumbered and slept and trembled in all his limbs old Tidser. What he had been when he was young nobody could remember. Castleton had always known him as old Tidser who had had a stroke. The room contained a desk in which Mrs. Tidser kept her account books and a small safe in which she locked away her money, which was not much, but always sufficient to pay her way and minister to the comforts of old Tidser. Sol, their only son, was a cripple from his birth, and had not grown an inch since he was ten. He had many of the tricks of the monkey, coupled with a desire to hoard geological and other curiosities, bits of spa and crystal, chunks of lead ore and any thing that sparkled. He also added somewhat to the income of his mother by showing visitors the queer places of the Peak, guiding them into strange passes, piloting them over the hills, and making himself useful to the villagers in many ways, holding horses, riding them when he could, tossing the hay in summer, fetching up sheep from hard places in the winter, a tireless, restless, half-witted hunchback, with bursts of bad temper and intervals of mirth of an unnatural kind. He had been taught to read by one of the ropers, and the use he made of it was to cram what little intelligence he had with stories of pirates and robber kings, with secret murders and the doings of spring-heel Jack and other worthies of the blood and thunder literature which now cover the length and breadth of the land, a penny plain, and two-pence covered. He had a voracious appetite for food as well as criminal literature, which his mother knew to her cost; but the dear little, patient, soft-voiced wife and mother

bore with the lad meekly as part of her cross. She had received the consolation of religion through the ministrations of the Wesleyan minister, a kindly if puritanical pastor, and never forgetting the sin of her early married life, was always engaged in atoning for it. Such was the strange, almost weird, little family of which Sol was the hope and joy.

Sol was a fool more or less at all times. Jessop was a fool when he was drunk, and on these occasions he would take great notice of the queer little chap, and now and then treat him to a noggin of whisky or a pint of ale. And Sol often crouched under the window of the Duke's Head when Jessop sung his favourite songs and whistled a jig or two.

Sol was sitting on a ledge of rock on the other side of the brook that danced out of the cavern into the fresh air with a merry shout, as if Fate had not just then been very busy with the destinies of innumerable men and women whose fortunes were mixed up with the banishment of Jessop Blythe, now no longer a master of the ancient company of rope-makers, free tenants of the Duke, and men of unblemished honour as citizens of the Great High Peak. Notably among these persons was the female child that had just opened its eyes in the lapidary's cottage, whither its mother had been taken in when Jessop Blythe, having kept house a little over six months, concluded that he would live with his wife no longer, and his mother, in curious contrast with her nickname, had said to the deserted woman, "Come hoame wi' me, lass; he's my son, yo're my dowter, and I'll not see yo want."

"Good-bye, lad," Jessop shouted across the brook to Sol Tidser, who was lolling as comfortably on a dizzy seat as if it had been an arm-chair in the tap room of the Duke's Head.

"Hello, drunken Jessop!" responded Sol; "hello! gie us a song; how goes it? As we ascend the hill of life may we never meet a friend coming down!"

Sol had continually in his mind when he saw Jessop the

toasts, sentiments, and songs of the Duke's Head, and invariably accosted Jessop sober as he was accustomed to accost him drunk.

"Ah, yo silly fool!" said Jessop, half angrily, half in pity; "yo born idiot!"

"After many roving years, how sweet it is to come!" cried Sol, in a chanting measure, recalling Jessop's favourite ballad.

"Aye," said Jessop, with a curious smile, and speaking to himself, "'to the dwelling-place of early youth.' I reckon it'll be some time before I see it again."

"Good luck, Mester Jessop!" shouted Sol. "Come and get drunk! She wore a wreath of roses!"

"Ah, yo blathering fool!" said Jessop, impatiently; and then, waving his hand once more, he added, "Good-bye, owd wiseacre!" and passed on towards Castleton, to be stopped at a bend in the road by Zodack Bradford, who was smoking his mid-day pipe by the brook, and overlooking a tiny pool that reflected rippling shadows of rock and lichen, and nodding ferns that Zodack's mind rested upon "like sitting on a silken cushion to a tired man," he said to himself. Hearing a heavy foot crunching the roadway ahead, he looked up to meet the unusually defiant gaze of Jessop Blythe.

"Why, where art thou off to, Jessop?" asked Zodack, taking his pipe from his mouth and putting the question with something like anxiety in the tone of his voice.

"Gie us your hand, Zodack," said the outcast of the ropery. "Good-bye, owd lad!"

"Good-bye!" said Zodack. "What's the trouble?"

Jessop dropped the lapidary's hand, flung his old grey coat over his shoulder, and said, "Oh, nowt! I'm goin' to seek my fortune!" and went his way.

"If thou hadst used water to polish thy wit with instead of alcohol," said Zodack, as he knocked the ashes out of his pipe, "thou mightst have found thy fortune at home!"

CHAPTER III.

AT THE GATE OF THE WINDS.

It begins with "Windy Knoll" and ends with "The Travellers' Rest." Windy Knoll is the crown of the Winnatts Pass, overlooking as wild a region as you may find in England. At the date of this history, only a few years ago, "The Travellers' Rest" was anything but the haven its title would suggest.

Amidst the storm and stress of Windy Knoll, God dwelt with His wonders of cloud and sky. At the foot of the Pass, within the walls of his misnamed hostelry, lived Scarthin Blythe, a libel on the original man whom God made in His own image.

The simple people of the Peak still call the craggy gorge between Buxton and Castleton "the Gate of the Winds," as it was named of old by their predecessors, who endowed the country with such landmarks as "God's City," "Millstone Nick," "The Toad's Mouth," "The Devil's Hole," "Odin's Mine," "Dead Man's Clough," and "Hope Dale." The poet who said that "seas are the fields of combat of the four winds" had never faced the land-storms of the New World nor ridden through the northern passes of the Old. It was no wind of the sea that blew through the rocky gates as Jessop Blythe fought his way to his brother's abode on the night of his banishment from God's factory, and the cruel abandonment of his wife and child. It started forth as do the rivers of the Peak from subterranean depths, from unexplored caves and bottomless waterways. It was a local wind, that was content to storm the hills of Castleton and tear up and down the mile of ragged cleft that gives at last upon the Vale of Hope sentinelled by Mam Tor, and watched over by Win Hill, that had borne the shock of storm and tempest from the day of their first upheaval.

From this Gate of the Winds you enter a vast amphitheatre of stone-walled meadows, scattered homesteads, and heather-clad hills. Easterly stands Castleton, with its Ropery and Cavern, Hope, Brough, and Hathersage, and northerly, Win Hill, cutting in twain the moorland lines that break upon Hallamshire. Topping the mountainous hillocks, or marking their lower borders, tower the shooting-boxes of noble land-owners, some of them marking the very outposts of the Danish armies that withstood Alfred and Edward, his son, in these stony regions of Derbyshire, among whose many military relics still stands, within the region dominated by the Gate of the Winds, the castellated tower of William of Peveril, the natural son of William the Conqueror.

The natives of the Peak in the olden days had noted as a fact, what their successors of to-day regard as a curiosity, that the winds blowing from every quarter of the compass appear to mark the Pass of the Winnatts as their own. They had assailed the limestone fortresses and hurled the dust of ages around its turreted peaks centuries before Saxon and Norman; and to-day the sou'wester is just as triumphant in its autumnal revels as the four winds are wild and furious when they gather their forces to toss the snow sky-high, until the valley seems to be thick with ghosts and the hilltops resound with the cries of demons. If the sea rolled in the deeps of the Winnatts and washed the foot-hills of the adjacent mountains, it would be alive with traditional fiends, like the lonely heights of Belle Isle, on the iron-bound coasts of Newfoundland. Not that the rocky way through the windy gates is without its tales of misery and death. It has its ghosts of the unhappy lovers who on their way to a rival of the blacksmith of Gretna Green, who lived in the region of Windy Knoll, were murdered in the Pass and buried in one of the many secret places of the winds. Tradition, though it does not record the names of the unhappy victims, brings the murderers to justice, which is more than was done, as it seems, for a certain Northam Holmes, whose untimely end at the Gate

of the Winds, while it is a preliminary incident of these pages, only casts an attenuated shadow over the life of the assassin or his brother, who was an unwilling possessor of his guilty secret. It, nevertheless, supplies the key-note of the character of the master of "The Travellers' Rest," and helps to justify the evil reputation of the Blythes, who, nevertheless, give to these chronicles a heroine not unworthy of the boasted nobility of the women of the Great High Peak.

When the wind was at its height, two men were having a bitter altercation in a lonely room of the Travellers' Rest that had once been its bright and comfortable bar-parlour. They were Jessop Blythe and his elder brother, Scarthin.

Jessop had a little matter of business to transact with his brother before leaving the neighbourhood. They told him at the Duke's Head that Scarthin had ridden through the village in the morning, and had said he did not expect to be back until late. Jessop had, therefore, lingered about the village until it was dusk. Then he concluded to walk to the Travellers' Rest and wait Scarthin's return. He could walk on through the night to Chapel-en-le-Frith, and get a train there for Liverpool, or walk to the northern seaport for that matter, seeing that he had plenty of time on his hands. This is how it was that Jessop and his brother met at an eventful moment in this history. They both looked far older than their age. Scarthin was bony and wrinkled, with small, shifting eyes, unusually close together, and a mouth that was hard as his voice and tight as the grip of his knuckly fingers. His face was an index to his avaricious and treacherous nature, though he managed to put a certain kind of forced smile into it that deceived not a few. He was not more than forty years of age, and yet during his short life, by dint of every artifice known to the miser and financial trickster, he had accumulated considerable moneys and had liens on many properties. During his tenancy of the Travellers' Rest, which he had come into as mortgagee, he had allowed that once popular hostelry to

degenerate into what might have been called a hovel, but for its handsome forecourt and artistic façade.

It was said of a London poet that, running to pick a buttercup, he was chagrined to find it was a guinea. Scarthin Blythe's nature was just the opposite of this. If he had mistaken a buttercup for a sovereign he would have trampled the flower to pulp with his steel-tipped boots. Nothing was of the smallest moment to him that was not gold or capable of being turned into money. If it was possible for him to love anything, it was Jessamy Rod, his mare, one of the most remarkable animals among the many fast goers in the Peak. Nothing could beat her, nothing could touch her, up hill or down ; and she was the one living thing that Scarthin was ever known to talk to in anything approaching to pleasant tones. His voice was almost human when he addressed her, his hand almost tender when he stroked her silky mane.

Jessop Blythe, sober, was as firm and steadfast in his manner as Scarthin was nervous and shifty. One looked you steadily in the face, the other looked every way but into your eyes, and never stood still ; yet Scarthin had been successful in many an ugly tussle with trained men who fight steadily. If you are brought up in the Peak country of Derbyshire, you have to fight from your boyhood up ; for if there are noble exceptions and fine men to quote to the contrary, there is a good deal of the savage still left in the Derbyshire nature. Quarrelsome men about Castleton, however, were wary of Scarthin Blythe. The tips of his boots were as sharp as the grip of his hard right hand was vice-like and vicious. Good a fellow as Jessop was when compared with his brother, his moral character, as we know, was nothing to boast of ; but he was his own enemy. He had injured nobody of malice prepense. Drink and shiftlessness were his besetting sins, ministered to by a love of company, a hand at cards, and the discontent that comes of idleness. It was thought that marriage would reform him, a terrible mission too often assigned to a trusting wife. For a whole month it seemed as if Jessop had

turned over a new leaf for good. After this he fell back into bad ways, and his wife bore the change "with an ill grace," his mother said, "instead of coaxing th' lad, and not tryin's patience wi' hard words," and before half a year was over they led a cat-and-dog's life. From loving the woman, as he thought, he came to hate her, and they parted as we have already understood. Once during this last day before he left Castleton, as he vowed, "for good and all," it came into his mind to go and say good-bye to her, and ask her forgiveness, and kiss his little one, and embrace his mother; but he hardened his heart against his good impulses, though he knew that his mother at least, in her querulous way, was fond of him, and had always taken his part. "No," he said, "I won't be a weak fool; I'll go my ways; they've turned me adrift, and I'll go. Scarthin Blythe shall give me a slip of paper about that money on th' cottage, or let the whole thing loose, and I'll write mother a letter from Liverpool. Zodack Bradford will stand by 'em, and young Tregarron's no waster; besides, there's owd Woodruffe—he didna half like his job to-day—he winnat see harm come to them." Thus for his good thoughts; to them may be added a vague hope that Fate would befriend him beyond the seas; America was his El Dorado. He had heard of such wondrous fortunes won by Englishmen out there that he did not see why he might not have a chance to share in the good luck of other emigrants who had worked out their passages by land and sea. Only on the previous Saturday night, at the Wheat Sheaf, there was an Irishman who had been a lead miner twenty years back, and who was now on a visit to the Peak to show his wife and daughter the country he had worked in when he was poor, before he had the courage to emigrate to California, where he had mined his way into over ten thousand pounds, every penny of which he had brought home with him. Jessop tried to think that his disgrace had come upon him as a lucky impulse to force him out of the country, to compel him to get away over the hills that had shut him down in Castleton as if he were a prisoner.

"You'll keep it dark," said Scarthin, whose voice the wind seemed to mock with a "hoo-hooo-hoo" as it roared down the chimney, bringing with it a volume of smoke.

"Maybe I will, maybe I won't," was the response, and the wind still took part in the interview, shaking the outer shutters and whistling in the chimney-stack, the fire leaping up in the grate for a moment and illuminating the angry faces of the brothers.

"Is it only maybe, Jessop?" said Scarthin, "only may be?"

"That's all," was the reply. "Is it so, by Gosh," commented the other, "what's to decide th' may be?"

"Oh, one thing or another," said Jessop, in a free-and-easy way.

"You don't propose to come to any conclusion about it, eh?"

"I've never had to come to conclusion about such a devilish piece of work before to-night," said Jessop, his eyes fixed upon his adversary, who shifted his position every now and then, as a man might do who contemplated taking another at a disadvantage in a sudden assault.

"Oh, you haven't, haven't you?" said Scarthin; "but by Gosh you've gotten to gie me your word one way or another before you leave Travellers' Rest, or my name isna Scarthin Blythe."

Scarthin was growing angry. He snarled between his words and his small eyes sparkled. The more he was agitated the calmer grew Jessop, who was not—luckily for him—at the moment under the influence of Dutch courage. Though he had lingered about Castleton for an hour or two prior to leaving, he had contented himself with but one drink, and that was by way of accompaniment to his supper at the Wheat Sheaf, which he intended should be his stay until he was well on his way through the night and into the next morning.

"Do you hear me, Jessop?" exclaimed Scarthin, his last remark having elicited no reply from his brother, "I say you've gotten to come to a decision before you leave Travellers' Rest, or my name isn't Scarthin Blythe."

"Aye, I hear," Jessop answered; "some folk ca' yo by another name, and by God it seems to me yo deserve it."

"You think so, do you," hissed Scarthin, between his broken teeth. "Damn you, I've a good mind to throttle you!"

Scarthin was losing control of himself. He had sworn. It was altogether against his principles to swear. Equally contrary was it to his policy ever to threaten. He boasted himself that he never threatened, never said he would do a thing, that he did not do it. But Jessop's cool, watchful manner and his contemptuous words threw down his moral defences.

"Yo'd better not try it on wi' me," said Jessop, planting his feet firmly, stiffening his muscles and waiting for the attack, which came while he was warning his assailant.

Scarthin, with the spring of a tiger, flew at Jessop's throat. He was caught with a grip of iron and shaken off. Scarthin at the moment had the courage of an animal at bay. Staggering to his feet he hit out with his right a blow that might have felled an ordinary man, but Jessop caught it with his left-hand guard, and landed his assailant a counter on the chest that sent him reeling against the furthest wall, where he gasped and fumed and cursed between his struggles for breath as if he had been accustomed to profane swearing all his life.

"Yo're a fool, I tell yo, to try that game on wi' me, Scarthin; if I was not a good-tempered chap, I should have knocked your cursed head off," said Jessop, taking out a tobacco pouch and filling his pipe.

Scarthin watched him with a hate that was half-tempered with admiration; for was not this fighting man his brother, and had he not spared him? In his place, Scarthin reflected, as he trembled by the wall, he would have killed him.

Jessop went to the fire and thrust the bowl of his pipe between the bars and began to smoke. As he stooped, it flashed through the treacherous mind of Scarthin that he ought to have waited for a moment like that before he

had attacked him, so quickly did the vicious impulse follow the glimpse of a more generous thought.

"We might as well talk this thing out like men," said Jessop.

"Like brothers," said Scarthin, humbly.

"Cain and Abel were brothers," replied Jessop, pulling at his pipe.

The time was as eventful as it was inopportune for Jessop to visit his brother. That worthy was in the midst of a serious undertaking. The story may be very briefly told. The new bank at Glossop had been opened only some two or three years. Scarthin had an account there. He had freehold property at Glossop, and rents in Castleton. It did not seem good policy that he should let one bank have an inkling of his means. Nor would the two or three banks in which he made business deposits, had they combined to investigate his wealth, have come to a proper reckoning. Scarthin Blythe had a secret place within the walls of the Travellers' Rest, where he enjoyed the miserly satisfaction of counting over a considerable sum in gold. He loved to run his fingers through the glittering heap, and then to lock it away and cover up his hiding-place; and yet he was not all miser; for he had occasional "sprees," as he called them, which cost him both money and headaches, but these were intervals from sobriety only known to himself and Jessamy Rod, who carried him blithely and swiftly to Sheffield and even as far as Liverpool when the fit was on him and the devil possessed him wholly. At Glossop the chief clerk of the new bank had attracted Scarthin's attention. They had met in an odd way at a local inn where the clerk went for his luncheon, and where Scarthin generally put up Jessamy. Evil knows evil. A thief soon spots his fellow. Scarthin and Northam Holmes became chums; they became conspirators; but Holmes was the worker. One night he robbed the bank of its market deposits, which, coupled with some other embezzlements, amounted to a considerable sum. Scarthin was to give him aid and guidance in his flight. The first stage was to be the Travellers'

Rest. Division of the spoil being completed there, Scarthin was to pilot Holmes through the Pass, and cover his retreat in case of a hue and cry. It is a saying in Castleton that in a strong sou'-wester it is as difficult to crawl up the Pass as to avoid flying down it. It would not have been surprising on such a night, if even an expert rider should come to grief either in climbing or descending the Pass. While the brothers Blythe were bickering in the faded bar-parlour of the Travellers' Rest over the night's tragedy, Northam Holmes was lying a battered corpse by the side of his maimed and dying horse, half-way through the glen.

"Well, what is it to be, Jessop? I didna mean to harm you, lad; but you're a stubborn beggar, and you got my blood up."

"Not first time; yo'd do well to remember bits a feights we'n had as lads; yo're lucky I didna twist yo're neck."

"Look here, Jessop, I beg your pardon, humbly. I'm in a hole, don't split on me!"

"It was a damned piece of work!"

"He was against me, my enemy, a rogue, a thief, he'd stolen from me. I had a grudge agin him, and he was the strongest."

"I don't believe it, but that's no matter," said Jessop.

Scarthin's prematurely wrinkled face worked, his mouth twitched, a murderous fit was on him; if he had only had a weapon handy he would have weighted his soul with another crime.

"You were always hard on me," he said.

"Not so hard as I ought to have been; but shut up this argument, I'm in a bit of a hole mysen, and——"

"If I can help you," said Scarthin, shuffling to his feet.

"Yo can do something, and I come to axe yo to do it."

"I'll do it, Jessop; I'll do it," said the other, quickly; "but you mun swear to keep dark about what you say you've seen."

"I'll swear nowt," said the younger Blythe, "and if yo

attempt to lay a hand on me again I'll throttle yo, or punch yo into the next world."

"Very well, Jessop," said the other, "don't lose your temper, lad; I'm sorry I was put out so far as to raise a hand agen you; but look here, Jessop, you winnat forget that we're brothers?"

"Up to now yo've never allowed me to forget it, and after what I've seen to-night I'm likely to go on remembering it."

"Well, dash me to bits, what did you see? A decamping banker's clerk, with his mester's money and mine trying to get away through th' Winnatts, and by a short cut, by Gosh, and on a horse with a foot as slippery as an eel's, and he breaks his neck; any man mun have been a fool to think he could ride through Gate-o'-th'-Winds on a night like this!"

Scarthin, as we have already noted, made it a rule not to swear. If he had sworn a good deal during his encounter with Jessop, that must be taken as the exception to justify the general observance of the rule he had laid down for himself, more particularly when he was in company that he desired to impress with his high moral state. It is true that he invented expletives, such as Gosh, but they were harmless in the general estimation, and as Zodack Bradford had said characteristic of a trimmer who wanted to conciliate both heaven and hell. Scarthin had chuckled until his teeth chattered again one day at Castleton market on hearing the new curate from the South say that whatever Mr. Scarthin Blythe's faults might be he was not a swearer, nor in any way given to profane language. The new curate should have heard him on his orgies at Sheffield and Liverpool, when the devil had more than his customary possession of the master of the Travellers' Rest. Furthermore, the new curate said there was another thing for which Mr. Scarthin was to be admired, namely, that he had ceased to make the Travellers' Rest a house of call for consumers of alcohol, at which, however, one or two of his hearers informed him that it was the consumers who

had done that for the place, not relishing either Scarthin or his liquor.

"Yo're fishing to know just what I did see, brother Scarthin," said Jessop, emphasizing the word brother, and with a spiteful expression in his face. "Well, what I did see would hang yo! Yes, by God, I mean what I say—would hang yo; and sooner or later yo'll swing, I mek no doubt o' that. Fayther said yo'd come to th' gallows; aye, many a time he said it!"

"Fayther was not over kind to any of us," said Scarthin, suppressing his anxiety, "but Jessop, lad, don't be hard on me. I tell you the chap as lies dead yonder was my enemy, a thief who'd gotten my money——"

"Why I saw yo lead him up th' Pass and pull bridle of horse right into cleft as was nivver intended for horse or man, seed you get him to top of precipice, couldn't hear what he said for th' wind, and only that moon come out strong at reight moment I should na have seen you just us sudden put your shoulder to the horse as was already struggling to keep his foothold, I tell you but for moon I wouldn't have seen yo push th' poor beast over and man on his back; and it seemed as if wind stopped to listen to rush of stones and cry of rider and thud of horse as they went to th' bottom."

"You say you saw that, by Gosh!" exclaimed Scarthin, making a step towards Jessop.

"And I followed yo round bend of Pass and seed yo rifle the body."

"It's a lie," said Scarthin, "go and see for yoursen, it's a lie I say, they'll find money on him in th' mornin' if anybody finds him before me. Every penny, except what he took from me, and——"

"Tell that to a Castleton jury, tell it to th' judge at Derby Assize; they'll want to know all about it," said Jessop, with a scoffing laugh.

"Heaven blind me, but you're bitter on your brother, you always was! But what are you going to do about it?"

"I'm not going back to Castleton to tell them yo've killed a man; I'm not goin' to split on yo!"

"I felt sure you'd stand by me," said Scarthin, with a sigh of relief.

"Depends on circumstances," said Jessop.

"What circumstances?"

"If I'm called on to assever, which isna likely, because I'll be out of the country."

"How do you mean, lad?"

"I am off, levantin like yonder dead chap i' the Pass, but wi' nobody else's money 'cept my own. When I saw yo going up Pass with him so mysterious I was coming to talk to yo about that hundred pounds."

"Ah! you owe me a hundred pounds," said Scarthin, forgetting the peril of the time in his remembrance of Jessop's money indebtedness to him. He was one of those men who have a tremendous power of concentration, who can give up their minds wholly to the subject of the moment.

"Yes, that's so," said Jessop.

"And I've a mortgage on your mother's cottage and museum; well, brothers should be brothers."

"Gie me the mortgage, and don't molest my mother, nor Zodack Bradford, nor my lass, if ever yonder infant grows to be a lass."

Scarthin Blythe took from his pocket a bunch of keys, opened a desk, drew forth two documents and gave them to Jessop. The younger brother opened them. One was a parchment deed; the other was a note of hand. He walked to the fire and dropped them upon the hot embers, which blazed up with them. The wind that had been shaking the door as an angry giant might, now fairly lifted it from its hinges, and with a rush whisked the burning papers up the chimney and scattered them in sparks that rose and fell and pirouetted against the overhanging rocks until they looked like fireflies in an American forest.

"And now you want some money for your journey," said Scarthin, who was watching his brother with a tigerish

look in his eyes and a crouch in his wiry back that Jessop did not observe. Indeed the young fellow at the moment was thinking that at least he had done the one good thing he desired for the industrious little home at Castleton, upon which hitherto he had brought nothing but trouble.

"No, Scarthin, I'm not looking for blood money."

"Curse you!" he hissed through his teeth as he leaped upon Jessop, who for a moment was off his guard, "curse you, I see your game; you've got what you wanted, you'll betray me," the words half formed coming out in gasps and hisses as he clasped Jessop's throat with his bony fingers. Jessop reeled under the assault, and Scarthin pinned him against the hard oak door that happily the wind had partly undone; as it had half-opened one way under pressure it now gave in the other direction, and the two men fell headlong into the forecourt. The struggle on the ground was sharp and desperate. In the end Jessop was uppermost. It was fortunate for Scarthin that Jessop did not wear steel caps to his boots. Perhaps it was well for Jessop, too, who knows?

"Coward, thief, may the gallows get yo!" he gasped as he gave the prostrate man a kick that had nearly avenged the murdered man in the Winnatts. It had only been a question of an unshodden boot as against a pair of steel clips.

But the devil takes care of his own.

Early the next morning Mr. Scarthin Blythe reported to the police the discovery of the dead body of the absconding clerk, and a dying horse that had missed his footing and fallen headlong into the Pass. A considerable sum of money belonging to the bank was found on the dead man, with certain compromising papers. The horse was ordered to be killed, and was shot accordingly, and the dead rider was carried into the Travellers' Rest, where an inquest was held. Scarthin Blythe was the chief witness. The body was identified by the widowed mother of the deceased. The bank manager gave evidence as to certain of the monies belonging to the bank (it had cost Scarthin a pang to

restore the notes and gold he had previously removed), and a verdict of "accidental death" was returned. One of the jurors desired to append "while flying from justice," but the Coroner overruled the proposal, and gave his certificate for the burial of the body. Mr. Scarthin hoped that at least a portion of the money found on the dead body might be handed over to the young man's mother, as probably some of it might not belong to the bank. The Coroner, however, impounded the money pending instructions from a higher authority than his own. It is understood that it was afterwards surrendered to the bank, and no more was heard of the tragedy beyond its addition to the older and more terrible stories and traditions of the Winnatts.

And Scarthin Blythe continued to prosper and wax rich; while Adser, his niece, under the guardianship of Zodack Bradford, belied the parent stock, on her father's side, by her beauty, her wit, and her honesty—as will be seen hereafter.

CHAPTER IV.

"THE MEMBER FOR WALES."

THE Red Lion, which puts out a low, bulging window and a tempting porchway upon the north side of the Market Place in Upper Buxton, is a well-patronised hostelry. The characteristic perfume of brandy and sawdust, which pervades hotels in country districts, is supplemented at the Lion with an odour of stables and cigars. It is a horsey house. The landlord rides a fast mare that is known throughout the Peak. Every other day a coach and four starts from the Lion for the various attractions of scenery and palace that make Buxton a popular centre of local travel. The Market Place and the tavern have both a cheerful, clean, country look, and suggest leggings, whipstocks, guns, and sporting dogs. The Lion is the favourite resort of the farmers and landed gentry of the district. In

its smoke-room, on Saturday nights, there are gathered together the chief tradesmen of the old town, which is more or less cut off from the fashion and piety of Buxton proper, and its pride of baths and mineral springs, of hydros and glittering lapidary depôts. If you want to know the news of the Peak, not to mention the political opinions of the outspoken voters of the hundred, the smoke-room of the Red Lion is a place to frequent during any stay you may be making among the hills and dales of what the local reporters of the press love to call "The Switzerland of England."

Twenty years after the banishment of Jessop Blythe, the protégé and successor of the exiled roper was introduced to Mr. Geoffrey Lathkill, who had been shooting at Chatsworth, and having heard a great deal about the Peak country, which he had never visited, though he claimed to know England pretty intimately, he resolved to make a brief stay at Buxton, and visit some of the lions of the Peak from that centre. Chatsworth is called the palace of the Peak, but it is claimed by topographical authorities that it is really outside the established boundaries of the Peak, of which Castleton is the very small capital, being nothing more than a village, romantically situated, however, and of historical importance.

A wanderer on the face of the earth, with, nevertheless, very pleasant headquarters in London, overlooking the Park on the sunny side of Piccadilly, Lathkill loved the byeways of the world, and more particularly the world's old taverns and places of "good entertainment for man and beast." It was not so much the vinous attractions of the bar-parlour, or the tobacco of the smoke-rooms of old inns, as the men he met there—the odd characters, the unsophisticated life of these places—that drew him thither. Thackeray, though he enjoyed the Bohemianism of the bar-parlour, required also the additional charm of a good glass of wine. Lathkill was not a sybarite. He enjoyed his wine, and, when occasion favoured the sentiment, he was a disciple of Brillat Savarin. But above all things he liked

to mix with the people. He had roughed it sufficiently in all parts of the world to be independent of his palate, free from the tyranny of epicureanism. He enjoyed the unrestrained conversation of the smoke-room and the quiet egotism of the bar-parlour. Nothing pleased him more in his wanderings up and down the United Kingdom than, after a late dinner, to stroll into the smoke-room of the hotel where he might be staying and smoke a cigar with the tradesmen of the town. How it happened that he and Tregarron came to meet at the Red Lion in Upper Buxton was in this wise.

Now, Lewis Tregarron, the Welshman, the boy of our opening chapter, had at eighteen been duly elected a master of God's factory, a chief among the ropers, in accordance with the desire of Jessop Blythe. He was eight when he staggered into the factory, foot-sore and famished; ten when Jessop Blythe was banished; eighteen when he was made a master; and when we meet him again he is eight-and-twenty; and it may be incidentally mentioned at the same time that Adser Blythe, the daughter of the exile, would be in her twenty-first year. Tregarron was not only a master in God's factory, and elected at an unusually early age, but a man of importance in the estimation of the Red Lion smoke-room, though at Castleton he was still regarded as a lad. They did not, as a rule, value youthful genius up in the Peak. Experience was the great thing there. Old men were as much esteemed in Castleton as they are in Central Africa, where a grey beard is a passport to confidence and respect. If you have a white head in the regions of the Mountains of the Moon, you are called father, and your words are words of wisdom and of truth. The Peak did not take much stock in what young people thought; but Tregarron was an exception. Moreover, he looked older than he was, and could speak in public, and had a fearless way with him, always providing that Miss Adser Blythe was not in his company, for then he was soft and gentle and submissive, and even boyish in his interpretation of her whims and fancies; would climb any height for her, plunge

into any brook, do anything to please her; they were like brother and sister in the way they went about together, if any brother could be found who was so considerate of a sister's wishes.

Tregarron, on the occasion of our meeting him at the Red Lion, was making his half-yearly visit to Buxton and Derby to sell his cordage, accompanied by the Senior Master, who still survived, and was hale and hearty in his eighty-fifth year, though Tregarron had fixed his periodical visits to the outlying towns to fit those of Woodruffe, that he might take care of him. The old man was strong for his years, but a trifle deaf, and was apt to wander a little in his mind when most he should be alert, notably at railway stations and street-crossings. He had taken a fancy to Lewis Tregarron from the moment that his friend Jessop Blythe had been cast out of the ropery. There was something so touching in the grief of the Welsh lad when he found that his second father by adoption had left him that Woodruffe, who had been the mouth-piece of the factory upon that occasion, felt a certain personal consolation in voting himself to the guardianship of the little waif, and Tregarron, in the course of years, came to love the old man, dividing his affections between Zodack Bradford and the Senior Master, while keeping a sacred corner in his heart for the deserted and motherless infant of Jessop Blythe, who had grown into a handsome young woman.

As already intimated, twenty years after the disappearance of Jessop Blythe, and in the present year of grace, the Red Lion smoke-room was talking about the banished rope-maker and the masters of God's factory.

"I am an owd man now," said William Woodruffe, mumbling over his pipe, "and behind t'age, as Tregarron says, but I'n browt up ten childer and lived to see my great-grandchilder happy, and I'm eighty-four years of age, and I'n nivver had a day's sickness i' my life, and what does a man want more? Though, mind ye, if Jessop Blythe be comin' hoame, as they says, wi' pockets full o' gowd, why nobody'll be so glad as me, seein' as I was the man as had to turn him

adrift on t' world ; but there's some lads as drops on their feet, and meks friends whatever the height they tumble from ; and Jessop could sing a good song, and, by Jingo, if he hasna left his whistle behind him wi' his dowter, as can chirrup like a blackbird, and——"

Here Mr. Jerry Bray, the chief draper of Upper Buxton, an active, dapper little man, with an immaculate neck-cloth and the manners of a pew-opener in a fashionable church, interposed with a remark to the effect that the company should hear the member for Wales, a suggestion which met with the endorsement of several noisy "Hear, hears." Mr. Jerry Bray meanwhile subsided behind his pipe, at which he pulled vigorously, and the smoke-room in nods and winks intimated its satisfaction at the interruption of Mr. Woodruffe's reminiscences ; for Woodruffe was a talker, and, being old, and just a trifle arrogant on that account, commanded a certain amount of attention. He was no longer the calm, upstanding, alert veteran who had spoken to Jessop Blythe the verdict of his fellows, but a stooping, wrinkled, bald-headed old fellow in knee-breeches and velvet coat, with a high collar and brass buttons, that he had worn on Sundays for forty years. He looked very picturesque in contrast with the other men, who were attired in the clothing of ordinary middle-class life ; though Tregarron was dressed in his best, a black cloth coat and grey trousers, with a yellow neck-tie that suited his swarthy complexion.

Mr. Geoffrey Lathkill wore a brown lounge jacket and a soft bowler or deer-stalker hat, pushed back almost into his neck, and showing a well-shaped head, with closely-cropped dark hair. He was tall, well-knit, wore a soldierly-looking moustache, had the easy gait and manner of a man of the world, held himself well, but without the slightest affectation of the athlete or the aristocrat. He looked like the kind of fellow any one can get on with until they take advantage of his amiability. The impression he had made at Chatsworth was no less favourable than the impression he generally made in smoke-room, bar-parlours, or in any

other kind of either select or miscellaneous company. There was no particular credit in this. He was a man of means, enjoyed life, knew how to get the best out of it, did not go about the world merely because he could not rest, but for the reason that he enjoyed the excitement of travel and had an artist's and a scholar's appreciation of all he saw.

Lewis Tregarron had been nicknamed "The Member for Wales" by the Radical agent of the district, in compliment to Tregarron's political views, and his oracular method of expressing them. At a Castleton Parliamentary election Tregarron had ascended the hustings and championed the cause of Home Rule for Wales, not a disloyal Home Rule, as he said, not a Home Rule that should contain even a suggestion of separation, but a Home Rule that should make the principality of Wales an ally of England, instead of a conquered dominion. He affected to trace his blood back to Welsh kings and Welsh bards, to chieftains who had marched to the stirring strains of "The Men of Harlech," and it thrilled his soul to think of the Welsh fighting shoulder to shoulder with the English, the Scotch, and the Irish against a common enemy, but not as slaves, not as myrmidons, but as free men, Welshmen who governed themselves in their own Parliament House, worshipped in their own free church, spoke their own language in their schools, and with a president who should take the hand of Queen Victoria, not as her vassal, but the ally of her throne and power. Of course, the clever Ministerial candidate doubled Tregarron up when these ideas came into the ring of controversy; but at the same time there was something so poetic and earnest, something so superbly unpractical in Tregarron's ideal Home Rule for Wales, that he made a remarkable impression upon the Ministerial party, and delighted old Zodack Bradford beyond measure. "It's like trying to mek history into fairy tales," Zodack Bradford had said, "and it's a deal more harmless than what they call anarchy, which doesn't know what it wants, and means to blow folks to bits till it gets it."

The Radical agent, on the other hand, said Tregarron was only a little before his time, like all other reformers, and he'd be hanged if the fiery young Welshman shouldn't stand at the next election as the Labour candidate. Tregarron had replied that the highest honour he could dream of in the regions of the impossible, which he continually visited, would be to sit in a regenerated House of Commons—with every branch and corner of the Empire represented—as the member for Wales, delegated by the Parliament of the Principality to the Imperial legislature that was charged with the foreign and general policy of the empire, carrying the Imperial sword, and wearing the Crown of War. So they called Tregarron the "Member for Wales," and the chief draper of Upper Buxton, smart and ready, as became his calling, invited Tregarron to say something.

Presently a young fellow who was sitting near the fireplace under the picture of the Durham Ox that was matched on the other side of the mantel by a hunting scene, in which the hounds were represented in full cry, leaned back in his windsor-chair and looked round the room for attention, as if he were accustomed to be listened to and taken seriously. This was our friend Tregarron, the Welshman. "Why, gentlemen," he said, in a voice much deeper in tone than might have been expected from so slim though wiry a person, "I don't know that I've got anything to say; I have nearly had a fight already in the market-place with a man who called me a damned Socialist, and said he'd a mind to smash my face; I'm glad he didn't try it or we might have had an inquest, and that would be a bother, eh, Mr. Bray!"

Jerry smiled and puffed at his pipe in a knowing kind of way, as much as to say, "I told you we should have something worth listening to if we could only get the member for Wales to speak."

"And thine wouldn't been the body we'd had to sit on," said the butcher of the place, Mr. Jabez Salt. "I seed thee wollop a chap at last election, and by gum, for a light-weight, that's a pole-axe of a fist."

"Why, we practice a little up in the Peak," said Tregarro, "and we are no fools, we ropers of Cavedale; we know a hawk from a hernshaw, and can see through stone walls as well as most."

"A hernshaw's a bird as I nivver heard on," said Mr. Salt, "but there's one thing yo know up yonder, and that's the biggest price for twine," at which the smoke-room laughed, and Tregarro refilled his pipe as he went on in a general way to speak about certain familiar characteristics of the Peak.

"The Member for Wales" spoke with little or no dialect. Now and then he used a Welsh phrase either by intention or as a surviving remnant of the teaching of his dead mother; and he affected Welsh manners so far as he understood they were Welsh, for he had not seen Wales since he left it with his mother and father seeking work. At the same time he had taken some trouble to try and identify his family connections, which had fallen into shady places, leaving him in a workhouse, and finally landing him a waif and an object of charity in the ropery at Castleton. He was an interesting-looking young fellow. His hair was black and long; his eyes dark and deep-set; his nose prominent; his chin not broad enough to suggest great strength of character; his lips thin but daintily curved; his face altogether poetic. His eyes indicated strong passions. They flashed when he was very much in earnest, and when he was tackling an opponent they had a sort of fascination in them that might be calculated to mislead an opponent on a fencing bout, as they certainly led astray the men who boxed with him once a week at Castleton, the general report being that Tregarro got such a hold upon a man's attention by the strength of his eyes and the way in which they fixed a man that under the spell of them he could invariably hit his opponent where he pleased. Nick Scarthin said Tregarro's was "the evil eye, and would end i' trouble."

"Tregarro," said old Woodruffe, who had been waiting for an opportunity to continue his discourse, "makes out as

we're all Socialists, we ropers o' th' Peak, seein' as we pays no rent, and meks our own laws, and——"

"Yes, that may be so," remarked the draper, once more rescuing the smoke-room from the garrulity of Billy Nipper, "but let's hear the Member for Wales."

"There's a stranger present, gentlemen," said Tregarron, glancing at the opposite corner of the room, where Geoffrey Lathkill sat smoking a cigar with a brandy and soda, and impressing the room generally with an unconscious superiority of manner that had already been acknowledged by special acts of attention. The smoking-room was waited upon by a buxom maid who would have done honour to the smartest of German beer-gardens. She had been unusually deferential to the gentleman who was staying in the house, and to whom had been allotted the best bedroom. "As I was observing," went on Tregarron, "when we are by ourselves we address each other by familiar nicknames, and it's all right, but to call a man Member for Wales may be to make him seem ridiculous in the eyes of a stranger."

"If you are referring to me," said Geoffrey, taking a cigar from between his lips and tilting his chair into the perpendicular from the angle of ninety degrees at which he had been balancing it, "I hope you will not look upon me as a stranger, I know that among comrades and neighbours a nickname, or the abbreviation of a Christian name, often implies good-will, and even affection; so pray let me be one of you for the time. I understand all about nicknames, and have generally found that they belong to popular as well as celebrated people. There was Lord Beaconsfield, you know, whom the people called 'Dizzy.'"

"Bravo," said Jerry Bray.

"And there is Mr. Gladstone, who is called 'the Grand Old Man.'"

"Old nuisance," remarked the butcher, quietly.

"Not so old as me by two years or more," said Mr. Woodruffe.

"But there are inappropriate nicknames, look you," remarked Tregarron, "given, perhaps, with well-intentioned

humour; we have among us one of the most generous men, and yet we call him Billy Nipper."

"Hear, hear!" shouted the smoke-room.

"Who are yo calling names?" cried Woodruffe, in his highest notes.

"You, old father Woodruffe," said Tregarron, "because we love you."

"I doant know about that," said Woodruffe.

"Have a glass wi' me," said Mr. Salt, leaning over the man who sat next to him in order that he might lay his hand upon Billy Nipper's arm.

"Four o' rum hot," was the old man's prompt reply, as the buxom maid who waited upon the smoke-room paused to take the orders of the room.

"Anyhow," continued Geoffrey, "I am a man of the world, and I hope I may be so regarded by, may I say, the Member for Wales?"

"My name is Lewis Tregarron," the young fellow replied. "In which name, so far as I am able, I make you welcome to the Peak——"

"Thank you," said the other; "I am Geoffrey Lathkill, a traveller."

"In what, may I ask, sir?" said Mr. Jerry Bray, expecting to find in the stranger the member of some great commercial firm, who was on the road in a special capacity, perhaps to revise the work of one of his travellers.

"What in?" said Geoffrey, smiling and tilting his chair back into its former angle; "well, in railway trains, sometimes in carriages, now and then in ships, and frequently on horseback," at which easy effort at repartee the smoke-room gave a general guffaw at the expense of the draper, upon the conclusion of which Geoffrey said, "The truth is, I am travelling for pleasure and instruction, and it will interest me very much if Mr. Tregarron will respond to your invitation, sir," (addressing the draper with a great show of respect), "I am sure. I should like to know about this unrented factory, and the workmen who make their own laws."

CHAPTER V.

A SMOKE-ROOM ROMANCE.

"THAT was not exactly the subject we were talking of when you came in," said Tregarron, "though it was an incident by the way. You see, Mr. Lathkill, we have, a dozen miles from here, a company of craftsmen who have worked together in amity, and successfully, they and their forbears, for over two hundred years, and have never paid rent for the factory in which they toil. It is the Queen's freehold, leased to the Duke of Devonshire and let rent free to a company of ropers, seven of whom are the masters and employ the rest. The masters succeed in a manner that might be adopted by regular kings, look you, so long as such persons are part of the world's economy. The mastership goes from father to son. If there is no son, then the next oldest workman takes the master's place. In all this time, these two hundred years and odd, there has only been one dissentient incident and one innovation. It was that innovation and that dissentient incident that we were just now recalling, and for a special reason." The smoke-room settled down to its pipes and liquor with a relish, now that it had started the Member for Wales upon the subject that would interest the stranger; for they took a pride in having so excellent a talker among them, and in possessing not only that wonderful Devil's Cavern, but in having sheltered within its vast mouth the industry so well represented by Tregarron, the Welshman.

"Twenty years ago the Company of Rope-makers banished one of its masters," said Tregarron.

"Banished him!" repeated Geoffrey, blowing a wreath of smoke into the cloud that had already begun to blot out the Durham Ox and cast a heavy shadow over the hounds in full cry on the opposite wall.

"Yes; it was a severe measure," continued Tregarron, "but laws, written or unwritten, Socialistic or otherwise, must be obeyed. Christ was the first Socialist, but He founded the idea on the basis of the highest kind of government, look you, with laws of ethics and obedience to authority that never faltered nor changed. And what a monarch of love and order and kindness He was!"

"And yet Mr. Tregarron never goes to church or chapel," whispered Lathkill's nearest guest.

"Thank you for that Christian observation," said Jerry Bray, alluding to Tregarron's eulogium of the first Socialist.

"You're welcome," said Tregarron. "I know some of you think I'm a heathen, but you are mistaken. I'm not even a Socialist, as Socialism is explained by its principal fool disciples, who talk of things in common, and leave out ambition and enterprise and the love of offspring, and the privileges of skill and intellect and invention."

"Hear, hear," murmured the smoke-room, refilling its pipes, while Tregarron was unfolding a piece of paper which he had taken from his pocket.

"Yes," said Lathkill to his next neighbour, in reply to a leading question, "he seems to be a clever young man—perhaps a trifle conceited, but——"

"Yo're reight there; but it's our faults; we spoil him at th' Red Lion."

"Out of this latter-day idea of Socialism has sprung the modern upas-tree called Anarchism, one of the most devilish growths of human vanity and folly. What the apostles of Anarchy call their ideas and aspirations are a sort of political insanity, combined with an inconceivable cruelty and a shameless disregard of the first conditions of a possible human society of any kind. The last time I went to Derby on business, a queer-looking chap in the train gave me a pamphlet which sets forth the Anarchist programme. He said he found I was a man of ideas and liberal sentiments politically, and if I thought anything further in the direction of the self-sacrificing crusade, he could be heard of at a certain address in London. He was not an English-

man, but he spoke the language of our country, look you, a great deal better than some of us."

"That isna th' question, lad," remarked the butcher, in an undertone.

"If you will excuse me, the extract I have marked is very short, but I will read it to you: it puts the case of this Anarchy business and its own condemnation very clearly."

"Go on, lad, read it," said the smoke-room.

"Well, these are 'the ideas and aspirations'—I'm using their own words—of the new missionaries of these last days of the century," said Tregarron, reading from the new pamphlet as follows:

" 'We are Anarchists because we are determined to have no Government over men, seeing, in the first place, that in the new society that we aspire to Government could have no place. For no one can attend to and organise production but those who are really interested in it—namely, the producers; and any interference on the part of a Government or of any other body outside of them can only be a hindrance. That Government is considered to be necessary now is really only because tyranny and injustice form the basis of society and not the fellowship that we aspire to. Government is necessary to your masters to keep you down—to keep you from depriving them of their wealth and power as you ought to do; and Government is to some extent necessary to them while they carry on the war of interests which their commercial system is. Government never had any reason for its existence but tyranny, and degrades both the slave and master. Away then with Government! Make room for Anarchy, which is Fellowship and Harmony.' "

"A fellowship of thieves and murderers," said Jerry Bray, and the smoke-room said, "Hear, hear."

"Thank you, Mr. Bray," responded Tregarron, who now addressed Lathkill, saying, "I wanted you to understand, sir, that while some of us are Radicals in the Peak, we are not Socialists as the present-day apostle understands Socialism, and that we detest Anarchism. They are idiots who

recognise no authority, look you; they are lunatics who think any human system can go on without organisation and discipline. Now, the masters and men had no authority to drive him forth into the wilderness, but he could not for shame remain among us under a ban as it were, and besides, he was always a bit of a rover, fond of talking about foreign countries, would listen with his mouth open to any stranger who found his way into the Wheat Sheaf smoke-room to show off his knowledge of lands beyond the seas; so Jessop Blythe slung his coat over his shoulder and passed out of our ken, and it was to me a mere lad—but with, I hope, a man's heart in my bosom—one of the saddest days I ever remember."

The smoke-room gave a sympathetic something between a sigh and a grunt, and every man took a drink, as Tregarren continued.

"There's a kindly corner in the worst fellow's composition. Here was a man who deserted his wife and helpless babe, who preferred drink to the honest companionship of his neighbours and friends, and who yet was capable of kindness to a waif and stray; I was that bit of human shipwreck, left high and dry, a stranger, of no account whatever—in some respects an alien—and this drunkard, look you—this ne'er-do well—took me in, fed me, clothed me, and made a man of me!"

"Bravo," and "Hear, hear," said the smoke-room, which promptly washed down its approving exclamations with another drink and stretched its legs for the remainder of Tregarren's story.

"The innovation to which I had been referring, Mr. Lathkill," said the Welshman, addressing the stranger, "was this, which is a further example of the innate good there was in the fellow whom the ropery had to expel, to ostracise, to banish; and the innovation says a good deal for the fine principles, the Spartan sense of duty, which animated them; so much did they in their hearts, look you, sympathise with the failings of Blythe and so highly did they esteem his kindness to me—a mere waif and stray—that

while they fulfilled the law they strained a little out of love; Blythe, as a last request, asked that I should at a given age be made master in succession to him. Moreover, as I have said, he had previously had compassion upon me, a waif and stray of the world; and at eighteen I was made a master in God's factory. So inconsistent is man that Jessop Blythe left his family without even a parting word; yet he so softened the heart of his brother Scarthin, one of the hardest men in the Peak, that a mortgage and other responsibilities were lifted from Jessop's mother's property and the home of the dying wife—and the beautiful child that God had given him—made more secure. Now, after all these years, it is said that the exiled master is coming home; it is certain that he has been heard from, and it is equally certain, look you, that he is rich. And just as you came in, Mr. Lathkill, I was saying that this story of the ropery and the banishment of Jessop Blythe and his possible home-coming with riches and credit—won under another name across the seas—is a romance."

"And you were right," said Geoffrey, "one of those strange romances that men who travel come across once in a way. I think you said there was a wife and an infant?"

"The infant, if I may be allowed a remark," said Mr. Jerry Bray, "is now a lovely young woman, something in the way of beauty, sir, that you can only find in the Peak; we men are rough and ready, but our women are as fresh and sweet as the meadows of a Derbyshire dale in June."

"Honestly and poetically put," was Lathkill's reply.

"Oh, but Jerry is a poet," remarked one of the most silent men of the company.

"No, no," said Jerry, deprecatingly, "just a few verses now and then in the *High Peak Gazette*, I assure you, nothing more."

"I have read many a charming bit of verse in the poet's corners of the newspapers," said Geoffrey.

"Yonder maid o' the Peak doesna want verses written about her," remarked Mr. Salt; "she's a poem of herself, I tell you!"

. Tregarron quietly filled his pipe, lighted it with great deliberation, and smoked as if he did not care to be disturbed.

"It's a soare spot wi' Tregarron," said the butcher, addressing the stranger in a confidential whisper, "this lass o' Jessop's; that's where shoe pinches. Everybody knows that he's dead set on her; and nobody thinks she'll have him, and that's his trouble; leastwise that's what we thinks, and we puts most of his hard sayings down to that. He's oleways talking about what a man should do i' regard to seein' the world and how he can't get away, and that meks him mortally discontented wi' Government and talk o' Socialism, and stuff o' that kind. As for ropers there isn't a Torier lot on face o' t' earth; such laws and such prices for string—you'd be surprised if you lived i' these parts."

Tregarron and one or two others sitting near him entered into conversation, and talking now became general, the smoke-room breaking up into groups, which gave Mr. Jerry Bray an opportunity to propitiate the distinguished stranger.

"I hope you are staying in the country for some time."

"Not for long, I fear."

"There is my card; if I can be of any service to you I am sure I shall be only too happy."

"Thank you very much. I should like to be here when the banished man returns."

"Yes, I hope you may be; it's a rum go as we say in the Peak; my father knew him quite well, a regular want-rope, as we say, a good-for-nowt, a regular dare-devil; and it's only a month ago they heard from him."

"A young man, eh?"

"Oh, yes," said Mr. Bray, "comparatively new married, but left without seeing his daughter—dear, dear, what a fine girl she is to be sure; and does not dress ill for a peasant, as you say; she bought one of the best bits of blue summer serge I ever had only a month ago."

"She comes to Buxton, then?"

"Once in a way," said Mr. Bray, "with an old fellow, one of our characters, a lapidary, Zodack Bradford, a regu-

lar genius I can assure you; my friend Mr. Salt is quite right about the young woman; she is a beauty, only twenty, but fine limbed, proud, splendid hair, and a foot, well, I only wish I was a poet for her sake," reflecting on which ambitious hope Mr. Bray chuckled and emptied his glass of toddy.

"Will you take a parting drink with me, Mr. Bray?" said Geoffrey, and Mr. Bray, with a low bow, complied. "Very polite, I am sure," he said. "Scotch, Susan, with a bit of lemon, you know?"

"Yes, Mr. Bray," said the buxom maid, beaming pleasantly upon the dapper little draper, who whenever she visited his shop was sure to drop a row of pins, or a needle-case, or a yard of pretty ribbon, or something into her parcel by way of souvenir.

"A good girl," he said to Geoffrey.

"The Jessop lady or Susan?"

"Oh, both; but the Jessop lady, as you call her, she is a character in another sense, of course, from that of Mr. Zodack Bradford; bless you, she is as strong as a pony, and as graceful as—well, as herself, shall we say, for I have seen nothing more pliant and well-built. You'll see her if you should honour Cavedale; now that old Mucklethorpe's daughters are married, she acts as the guide to the High Peak Cavern, the Devil's Hole, as they call it, not that she's obliged to do it; she guides when she's in the humour, and assists at the lapidary's likewise, a wilful, free-and-easy, clever lass as you ever see. If her father does come home rich, as is reported, why, she'll be a heiress, think of it, the heiress of Jessop Blythe, the roper; sounds curious, don't it?"

"Rather," said Geoffrey; "just a little like the title of a novel."

"Just so," said Jerry; "but she's a fine girl."

"Are you a married man, Mr. Bray?"

"Oh, yes; very much so, indeed, thank you," said Mr. Bray, the draper; "Mrs. Bray is nursing her thirteenth at this very moment."

"I'm sorry for Mrs. Bray," said Geoffrey.

"Not at all necessary, I assure you," said Bray, smiling a little fatuously, at which moment Mr. Salt interrupted further conversation between Geoffrey and his neighbour with some private questions about the chapel services on the morrow. Thereupon Tregarron rose up and took a seat near Lathkill, who noticed that the Welshman, who had never been to Wales, was a wirily-built fellow of about five feet eight, well proportioned, but thin, with long hands and somewhat of an athletic pose. A natural instinct of Fate, or something that Theosophists would tell you was psychic force, or an hypnotic impulse, attracted these two young men towards each other,—the one a stay-at-home, with dreams of worlds beyond the seas; the other a wanderer who had been round the globe and seen some of its strangest nooks and corners.

"If you should chance to visit Castleton," said Tregarron, "I shall be very glad to show you the rope-walk; I live not very far from the cavern, and am nearly always to be found either at home or at work."

"Thank you," said Geoffrey; "this ropery is spoken of as a Socialistic community."

"Only in a metaphorical way," said Tregarron. "I fear I am responsible for that. I don't suppose the ropers ever heard of the word until I associated it with what, after all, is very much on the lines of the talk of the day——"

"Except," said Geoffrey, interrupting Tregarron, with an apology, "that in your factory every man is not his own master, it is not share and share alike, you don't live in common, you exist individually, have your own homes, your separate ambitions, and can make individual fortunes,—that is so, I gather?"

"Oh, yes, certainly; the only Socialistic idea is that we are an unrented and untaxed community in our factory, make our own masters and our own regulations of trade."

"The Trades-Unions do little less."

"But our laws are as those of the Medes and Persians; we have no disputes; no man is restricted as to work, and

on the other hand he is sure to begin with a living wage from his master."

"And your masters are hereditary?"

"Almost."

"I thought they succeeded from father to son?"

"When there is no issue the next oldest of the master's workmen succeeds."

"But in your case a special law was made?"

"Fortunately, the next oldest workman in that case resigned his pretensions. My election was a wholly indefensible business. However, we consider it the exception that proves the rule."

"Your ropery interests me very much, apart from the wonderful place in which the seven masters hold sway," said Geoffrey.

"I was proposing to myself a drive over on Monday morning," said Lathkill, who did not care to tell Tregarron that he had an epistolary talisman that would ensure him every possible attention.

"In that event," said Tregarron, "I am afraid we shall not meet again."

"I hope we shall," said Lathkill.

"I am going to Derby in the morning, and am not due to return to Castleton until the end of the week; this trip of mine and Woodruffe's is one of business and holiday; once in six months we go out into the world, as it were; that is, into a little bit of it; I sometimes think I may never go back; the railway, the sight of new people, the talk of folks who have been abroad, stories one hears in the smoke-room at Derby set me longing to be off; but there, I have no claim to make a confidant of you, sir. Pray, excuse me, I——"

"Don't apologise, Mr. Tregarron, and let me tell you that people have a way of telling their affairs to me; they see that I am what they call a man of leisure, I suppose; furthermore, you have already given me quite a personal interest in the ropery and the Blythes."

"It's time to close," said the buxom waiting-maid, point-

ing to the clock over the doorway, five minutes after which hour the Red Lion was barred to all who were not staying in the house.

As Woodruffe and Tregarron were lodged in the cottage of a friend, Tregarron said, "Good-night, sir, and I hope we shall meet again."

Lathkill rising, and taking the young fellow's hand, said, "Something tells me that we most assuredly shall."

CHAPTER VI.

ON THE THRESHOLD.

GEOFFREY LATHKILL was one of those nondescript Englishmen who never seek to make up their minds what they will do with their lives. They are always travellers, sometimes artists, occasionally war correspondents for London or American journals; they are good shots, pleasant companions, and not infrequently devoted in their friendships. They have inherited money, sometimes from shopkeeping, now and then from estates associated with honourable and historic names, once in a way from parents of humble origin who have given their sons sufficient education to unfit them for counting-houses; and they are to be found all over the world, roughing it in the bush or living luxurious lives in cities, gambling at Monte Carlo, mining in Australia, or farming in America, loafing through India, shooting elephants in Africa, canoeing over unknown rivers, smoking with strange warriors in the tents of Bedouin Arabs, risking their necks among the glaciers of the highest mountain ranges, sketching half-masked beauties in Morocco, with intervals of home during the sporting seasons of Scotland and the English counties, and with a general tendency to find every place insupportable after a month's sojourn; the victims of nothing to do with every desire to do it, and now and then heroes of romance, turn-

ing up in strange places at opportune times, at hand in yachts to rescue fugitives from revolted kingdoms, leaders of men in South American revolutions, friends of every nationality, and enemies of no one but themselves. Geoffrey Lathkill was typical of this class of wandering Englishmen.

He was the son of a London banker, who, dying, had left him a fine income well secured. Mrs. Lathkill had died soon after her husband, and Geoffrey was their only child, with no other obligation in life than he might elect to make for himself. His father was one of "the London brigade," who hunt two or three days a week during the season, starting for distant meets by early trains on winter mornings and having been in at the death as far away as Leicestershire, get home in time for an eight o'clock dinner. Geoffrey had seen little of this sport, having spent most of his young days in travelling. His father had spoiled him for business by giving him a yacht when he was twenty. The old man had been "tied to the oar," as he said, all his life, and was determined that Geoffrey should have a good time. Hunting was the banker's only recreation. He lived and died in Portland Place, had rarely left England, even during the general vacation, and was in many respects what people called an old foggy, but a good fellow; gave excellent dinners, not *a la Russe*, which he considered a system that lent itself to getting off poor joints and imposing upon guests mysterious and unwholesome dishes. His dinners were nevertheless elegant and his wines the best that good judgment could procure. The Lathkills were a branch of an old Derbyshire family, but neither father nor son had ever heard of the pretty little brook—from which they took their name—that waters a miniature valley in sight of Haddon, and afterwards runs off and hides itself like many another pretty Derbyshire stream among the subterranean valleys of the limestone strata.

Geoffrey Lathkill happened to be at Hamburg when the Duke of Devonshire was staying there for a short time. His Grace remembered his fine old father, the London

banker, and did not forget the Derbyshire name of Lathkill, and so it came about that he gave Geoffrey an invitation to shoot over the Stanage Moors. One evening, after dinner, the conversation had turned upon the wonders of the Peak, and Foljambe's Mammoth Caves of Kentucky had been challenged with the Cavern of Castleton, and his foreign scenery with the Gate of the Winds, the City of God, the Mam Tor, Kinderscout, Deadman's Clough, the Styx, and the other strange sights that make the Vale of Hope seem even sweeter than it is, and which, had they been situated in regions of difficult access beyond the seas, would have been famous in the mouths of English travellers instead of being merely local lions or the objects of eccentric antiquaries and peripatetic artists.

The Duke's guest, among other accomplishments, was an artist of no mean capacity. He had lodged among the students of Paris, and he had a studio in Florence. He had lived luxuriously and he had roughed it. Blessed with good health and a love of adventure, he could be as happy one way as another. His work had been hung at the Academy and at the Salon; and one of his drawings of a fight in the Soudan, which appeared in the great illustrated journal of Leipzig, had created quite a sensation among black and white men, when it was reprinted by permission in the *Illustrated London News*. But he only worked just enough at anything to promise distinction and usefulness before he gave it up for something else. It had occurred to him, after the talk at Chatsworth about the beauties of the Peak, that he would loaf a few days away among the mountains, and send his Grace a sketch or two of the country that he was so proud of, and that was so proud of the Duke. He might as well do that as anything else at the moment. For him the world was simply a playground, and even the most stupid thing he had not seen before he invariably found not altogether uninteresting. Geoffrey enjoyed himself much more than he imagined. Now and then he thought he was very much bored. But he had acquaintances, if not friends, all over the world; and they

were always glad to see him again. He loved books, too; was a man, indeed, of personal resource; but he could settle down to nothing; was always on the move; had felt that he should continue so until the time came for the lean conqueror to take him by the leg and hold him down. But there is another conqueror besides that lean one with the scythe. In every trouble and difficulty the wise Oriental was wont to ask, "Who is the woman?" While it is quite certain that the typical English adventurer is not wafted to all corners of the earth by a petticoat, nevertheless it was not "mere cussedness" that made Geoffrey Lathkill purposeless in his wanderings. There was a woman in his case, but they had parted long ago, and she had then become free to fulfil what she considered her mission in life, concerning which there will be something to record in future chapters.

And this is how it was that Geoffrey Lathkill came to be a guest at the Red Lion. If he could have drawn aside the curtains of Fate a few weeks beyond his visit to Chatsworth, I wonder if he would have accepted the hospitality so graciously offered to him. In due course we shall see what cause he had for joy or sorrow as the outcome of his impulse to make some sketches in the High Peak. Already he had expressed a wish to be present when the exile of God's factory should return; and in that connection there are other ties that may prolong his visit; no ropes of sand these; but such silken threads as fettered Mars himself.

Geoffrey found the next day rather trying. It was Sunday. Everybody appeared to be miserable. They went about as if they had lost their dearest friend or had suddenly learnt that the Joint Stock Company, in which they had invested their savings, had gone to that bourne to which so many Joint Stock businesses begin to journey from the moment the shares are allotted. And yet it was a lovely day. The sun was shining on everything and everybody. But nobody smiled, except in the evening when the Orthodox passed the congregation of Salva-

tionists, who had sallied out from their shed to cry aloud in the Market Place.

As Geoffrey stood by the drum and watched the proceedings, his thoughts went back a few years to a certain saint-like girl, and he wondered if it could be possible that so delicate, sweet, and cultured a maiden could have given herself over to this strident business with blatant trumpets, windy drums, and aitchless "mugs" in jerseys. He had heard that the girl he had known was "in the business," as a slangy young curate had told him on his way down from London to the Peak, "not, mind you, with an ordinary flag, but with a banner and a choir that might have gone astray from some Catholic chapel." And so Geoffrey stood and watched the Salvationists, until the landlord touched his elbow and told him that his dinner was ready to be served. Mr. Perrywick, the favourite and faithful servant of the wandering Englishman, would have saved the landlord this office; but Geoffrey had given him a day's holiday, as was his invariable practice whenever an opportunity occurred on Sundays. Perrywick had therefore taken advantage of his acquaintance with some other tried and favourite servant of some other English gentleman to make a trip to Dovedale, whither they had driven in a carriage and pair early in the morning from the Red Lion. Perrywick was a quiet, observant man, looked fifty, but was five years on this side of the half century, had been with Lathkill almost as long as Lathkill could remember; and, although not much of a talker, succeeded in entertaining his friends and acquaintances with stories of his master's adventures, occasionally tempered with incidents of his own experiences. Truth to tell, Perrywick was, however, rather modest about himself. Whenever he related the incident of his master deliberately sitting under fire to make a sketch of a battle scene in the Soudan, he never remembered to mention that he had himself received official commendation for bringing in one of his master's wounded friends. These were incidents, however, that belonged to a comparatively short career of war-corre-

spondence, and Perrywick had many other stories less sanguinary but none the less interesting. It was easier to draw him about these matters, reticent as he was, than his master, Lathkill, who found the future and its possibilities always more interesting than the past.

The next morning Upper Buxton was all bright again. The shops were open. Farmers drove up to the Lion. The people who had been marching with solemn tread and slow to the beat of innumerable bells were once more sprightly and alert. The sun did not shine any the more brightly, but it seemed less constrained in its beams. The placard announcements of concerts and other entertainments, which had been turned to the wall out of respect for the Sabbath, were once more allowed to challenge attention. The churches were shut up for the week. The religious cloak was put aside until Sunday should come again. Buxton was too busy to be bothered with open churches all the week. Who would pay them for their time if they were called upon to worship every day?

Geoffrey had a handsome carriage to take him to Castle-ton. The team was worthy of the Red Lion's horsey reputation. Mr. Jerry Bray happened to be passing as Perrywick was closing the door on his master. Bray took off his hat. Another toper of the Saturday night did likewise. Geoffrey responded with his best bow. "I shall be back for dinner," he said to his man, who touched his hat with a quiet air that was the admiration of two other men-servants who were looking on. Larry Short, the coachman, in a claret livery with gold buttons, cracked his whip, and the Market Place in a general way stood at its various doors, curious but friendly.

CHAPTER VII.

ADSER BLYTHE, THE EXILE'S DAUGHTER.

PACKED into a bend of the defile that winds upwards from Castleton to God's factory and the Devil's Hole is the establishment of the chief lapidary of the Peak. The adjacent Blue John Mine, not to mention the alabaster works and the lead mines of the High Peak Hundred, furnish the scientific stone-cutter with material for many kinds of ornaments and souvenirs of North Derbyshire. It would be manifestly indiscreet, not to say unfair, to identify the Blythes's place too particularly. Events over which the family had no control have made the house and shop, and indeed the whole of Cavedale, famous, and it is impossible in these days of publicity to hide your light, if it is anything of an illumination, under a bushel. At the same time, there are more than one or two lapidaries of note in Castleton, and there are rival manufactories even in Cavedale. But the business that belongs more especially to this record is that known as Blythe's, with Zodack Bradford as its chief expert. Truth to tell, since Jessop Blythe was banished from the rope-walk, Zodack had bent his back more and more over his lathe, and he had added a new workshop to the original premises. It was not generally known that he had become Widow Blythe's partner in the concern. He insisted upon taking this position, not for his own interest, but for the sake of Nannie Blythe's granddaughter, the little one whom Jessop had deserted. Zodack had worked almost day and night since that lamentable event; and he had put by every year a sum of money for the child, in case her grandmother should not do a rightful duty by her.

Although it was a combination of three houses, with a garden and croft at the back and a bit of meadow in front, and two workshops, one for show and one for designing and polishing on a grand scale, Castleton and Cavedale still

called the place the Lapidary's cottage, as they had done fifty years previously, when old Blythe set up in business there to catch tourists and sight-seers who found the Devil's Hole, the Blue John Mine, the Speedwell, and Peveril's Castle, objects of special interest, as is the case with travellers of the present day, in spite of the paucity of railway accommodation, which stops at Chapel-en-le-Frith and Miller's Dale. A cluster of whitewashed buildings is the lapidary's cottage, the one in the centre devoted to the sale-room, or museum, the right wing being the living-place, the one on the left the shop where visitors may see the chief workman polishing or shaping his wares; over this is the bedroom of Jessop Blythe's daughter, and at the back a large room, in which Zodaack Bradford designs his chalices, bowls, dishes, and goblets, cuts up minerals, engraves gems, and works at his lathes, the wheels of which keep time to his thoughts and fancies.

"You said you wanted to see Mr. Mucklethorpe," said the driver, turning in his seat to address Geoffrey, and at the same time pointing to a middle-aged gentleman who was standing in a field that was green with the showers of the previous week and brown with the first leaves of autumn that were blowing down from an adjacent wood.

"Pull up then, please," said Geoffrey.

The driver pulled up with difficulty. His horses knew they were close upon the Castle Inn stables, and did not understand Larry's desire to stop short of the meal and water, with oats to follow, that they knew awaited them.

Mucklethorpe, seeing that he was wanted, came to the wall under which the carriage stopped, and was duly informed of the visitor's desire to see the cavern and God's factory, whereupon he said he had just finished his dinner and would see about it, at the same time asking Geoffrey if he liked mushrooms. He had gathered about the last of the season, he was thinking, and if Larry would take them to the inn, Mrs. Jarvey, the cook, knew how to do them to a turn.

Larry took the napkin of mushrooms Mucklethorpe said

he would get ready for the visitor, and the handsome pair of greys from the Red Lion bounded along to the Castle Inn, where Geoffrey, having ordered dinner, lighted a cigar and then strolled in the direction of the cavern. He was a distinguished-looking young man of about thirty, above the medium height, dressed in a simple grey suit of tweed, with a felt hat of slightly conical shape, and a bit of heather stuck through the buckle at the side. He wore tanned boots, walked with an easy stride, and carried a hooked stick with a silver tip. It was a frank, open face, with, however, an expression of introspection in the eyes that seemed occasionally to cut him off from his surroundings, but he was an observant man, nevertheless, and, like Mr. Lewis Tregarron, could see as far through a stone wall as most. He was a fair man, bronzed with exposure to the weather, broad in the chest, and with something of the walk and manner of a cavalry officer. He wore his moustache *à la militaire*,—that is, carefully brushed and with an upward tendency at the ends, something of a curl, which was maintained more by the habit he had of twirling the ends round his fingers in reflective moments rather than by any artificial aid. It was a moustache that contradicted the something mild in his eyes; it was not silky, like the hirsute growth of young guardsmen who fascinate susceptible ladies, but stiff and obstinate; evidently a natural curl, that soldier-like twist of the ends. His eyes were of a greenish grey, steadfast in expression, though soft and a trifle dreamy. His mouth was shapely and his lips firm, and neither too thin nor too heavy. There seemed to lurk about the corners of his mouth a half-cynical smile at times, which suggested to men who did not know him a hidden conceit, a consciousness of superiority, and this was the most apparent when he was listening to travellers' tales that were not his own. His nose was rather broad, but with sensitive nostrils. If he was not exactly a handsome man, he was interesting, and gave you an idea of power that was suppressed. He spoke in an educated voice, and it was of a varying cadence, soft, and deferential to women.

It was noon when he paused on the threshold of the Lapidary's cottage. Mucklethorpe dined like the rest of his neighbours, very early in the day, having breakfasted about the time that many a London clubman is going home after a hand at cards or a game of pool. He walked into the shop or museum among the bewildering collection of Blue John chalices, rows of beads, alabaster cups and vases, paper-weights and monumental crosses, and was received by Nanny, otherwise "Stingy Blythe."

"Good-morning," said Geoffrey, taking off his hat.

"I wish yo good day," was the old dame's response.

"Mr. Mucklethorpe said I was to call here for the guide to the Devil's Cavern."

"Where did yo see him?" she asked.

"First in the roadway and, secondly, at the Castle Inn."

"Who was yo to ask for?"

"The young person who acts as guide."

"She's only just had her dinner, but——"

"And furthermore," continued the visitor, "I was to tell you—if you are Mrs. Blythe, as I assume you are—that he will have the candles and everything ready, and that I am to be taken over alone, because I have a letter to that effect—a letter from the Duke."

Having delivered himself of which message, Mr. Geoffrey Lathkill picked up a bit of the stone, which it is said the ancient Romans admired, and examined it with evident curiosity.

"A fine piece that," said the old woman; "yo'll not match it anywhere."

"It is a rare bit of colour," said Geoffrey; "I will call and look at your stock when I have seen the cavern. Do you get the stone here?"

"Well, close by," said the woman, "and the place as yo're goin' to see isn't a mine, it's a cavern, but I'll not detain yo sin' yo mean to call again."

Then limping to the foot of a strongly balustered staircase, she called out in a querulous voice, "Adser Blythe,

come and show this gentleman t' cavern—Adser, d' ye hear!"

"Who says so?" was the response from the next floor.

"Mester Mucklethorpe says so, and he's gone to open door, and get candles ready, and gentleman is to go by hissen, no matter who's waitin', and he's got a letter from t' Duke."

"Very well," was the reply, in a tone of voice that prompted the gentleman who carried the letter from the Duke to inquire who Adser Blythe might be.

"Why, sir, she's dowter o' my son that left us this twenty year, and the trouble I've had bringin' her up nobody'll know till th' last day, when all things is known," said the old woman, who looked at her visitor with a pair of bright beady eyes that illuminated what might have been a dead face, for all the colour there was in it to soften its many wrinkles. She was nimble enough, however, despite her age and her wrinkles, and gave one the idea that the common folk would get well beyond the reach of the crutch she carried before they called her by the nick-name which Cavedale had given her of "Stingy Blythe."

It is a common habit in the Midlands and the North to call young people by their full Christian names, no matter how many they may have. Jane Anne and Mary Jane, John George and James Henry, and the like, you will hear continually. If there is only one Christian name, which is rare, then it is customary among the ordinary classes to use both the Christian and surname. Therefore the child of the banished roper was known as Adser Blythe, except when some unusually familiar neighbour called her "Jessop Blythe's lass." Even her grandmother did not call her Adser, but always added the name of Blythe. Zodack Bradford was probably the only person who was content with that curious Christian name of Adser, but he loved her better than twenty thousand fathers or a whole heap of mothers as he was wont to say. It was indeed a curious name for a girl, Adser; but the Blythes were a curious people. The cler-

gyman when called upon to christen the deserted infant protested against calling the child Adser, but the grandmother "Stingy Blythe" recalled it as a feminine Christian name in her dead husband's family, and so Jessop's daughter had to be started in the world with the name of Adser, which, however, she contrived to make respected among the rough and ready inhabitants of the High Peak. The poor mother, with whom the disgraced roper told his mates he could "not get on with" had only lived to hear her first-born named, and pitiful as was her death, Jessop's stern old mother did not forgive her because, to use his own words once more, her lad did "not get on with her." When we make her acquaintance this was the shadow upon the life of Adser Blythe, though to be accurate in our history it is necessary to say that whatever shadow had fallen on her path had been dispelled by her high spirits and her good health. Nevertheless her grandmother's continual rating of the dead as the woman who had ruined her father's life was hard to bear, the more so when that father had basely left his child to be reared without the protection of his arm, or the comfort that a motherless infant should have had in a father's love.

It would have gone hard with Adser, in many a controversy with her grandmother, if she had not been able to lean against the authoritative support of Zodack Bradford, not to mention the sympathetic companionship of Tregarron, the Welshman, who had fulfilled the poetic appearance of his youth. He had grown up into a romantic young fellow. On being elected a master roper in Jessop Blythe's place, according to the banished man's last request, he had made his comrades an eloquent speech, in which he had addressed them in the poetic language of Barry Cornwall as

Labour's strong and merry children,
Comrades of the rising sun.

Zodack liked Tregarron, and spent many an hour in teaching the lad all he knew; and now that he was eight and twenty, and Adser eighteen, she had unconsciously

taught him to love her, not as Zodack loved her, but with the hope that one day she might accept him as her husband. But for this Tregarron, the Welshman, would have followed Jessop Blythe into the great world to seek his fortune; for there was in Lewis Tregarron's blood the hereditary strain of a romantic nature that longed to do something, to be a leader of men, to fight, to become a missionary, either civil, religious, or military; to be a martyr to science, or to rouse up his Welsh countrymen against what he called the tyranny of London and the British Parliament; but always when he had as good as made up his mind to be gone the face of Adser Blythe filled his soul, and her hands seemed to pluck him back again; for if she only laughed at his love and made merry with his verses he was never debarred her companionship.

And all this time we have been detaining the gentleman with a letter from the Duke, but he is well content, for Adser has presented herself and bidden him good day, and invited him to accompany her to the cavern, where Mucklethorpe had duly planted candles and blue fire and other illuminating material ready to do justice to the most remarkable cavern in the known world—to use his accustomed formula of preliminary description, only excelled for its stalactite additions by the Mammoth Cave of Kentucky.

"May I first look at your beautiful stock of curiosities?" said Geoffrey, once more glancing round the lapidary's museum.

"Oh, yes," said the girl, "but grandmother could have shown you the museum and things. I will call her and tell old Mucklethorpe to wait."

"No, don't call her; I would rather you were my guide."

"Then you'd better come another day," said the girl, "because old Mucklethorpe is a bit crotchety, and he's waiting for us."

"Oh, if Mucklethorpe is crotchety, why, let us go by all means," said Geoffrey, with an amused smile.

"Crotchety isn't the word for it when he's mad," said the girl.

"I hope he is not often mad."

"No, not often; he's a good sort as a rule, but he hates to be kept waiting, and there's the cost of the candles besides."

Then, altering her manner and looking at the visitor with a curious and inquiring glance, she said, "Grandmother said you'd got a letter from the Duke?"

"Yes, would you like to see it?" said Geoffrey, taking out a pocket-book and fishing from it a letter, which he placed in her hands.

"I've never seen a letter from a duke," she said, unfolding the note-paper and fixing her eyes upon it. "We're to show you every attention; why, of course, we should, but it's rare and fine of His Grace to ask us, isn't it, not that I think much of his writing" (looking up at Geoffrey apologetically), "if he'll excuse me for saying so; it isn't as good as our Zodaack Bradford's; I've heard old Mucklethorpe say the Duke's never seen this place, and that he's lots of property that he knows nowt about."

"Indeed," said Geoffrey, with an encouraging pause that induced Adser to continue, for she could see that the gentleman liked to hear her talk.

"Not that such a thing is anything against him, and everybody speaks well of him; indeed, I've never heard nowt against him or the family, and one of them, he was a Lord Frederick and handsome, was over the cavern some years ago, and even Zodaack, who don't like folk with titles and things, said he was a true nobleman."

Geoffrey nodded and smiled, and listened with an apparent air of respect and attention that was not lost upon Adser, who was accustomed mostly to tourists and big excursion parties, who were only civil and respectful to her when she had them in the cavern as their guide and threatened them in her descriptions of the grimest corners of it. She had been known on occasions, when she disliked either her work or the company she was piloting through the subterranean depths, to leave them in darkness longer than was either pleasant or safe on the brink of some roaring

cataract which she had stepped aside to illuminate with blue fire, but had paused and laughed mischievously to herself until the darkness and the roar of the waters had terrified them into a shivering anticipation of disaster.

Adser was not the regular guide to the Devil's Cavern of the Peak, which is said to be the only rival to the Mammoth Cave of Kentucky, but she liked the place, and since Mucklethorpe's two daughters had married and gone to live at Buxton she had oftener than usual given the tenant of the cavern her assistance in pioneering visitors through its labyrinths. Moreover, Mucklethorpe paid her sixpence for every trip, and "Stingy Blythe" said it kept her out of mischief. Zodack Bradford said it was a treat to hear the girl reel off her story with extemporaneous additions and dramatic touches that added to the impressiveness of the weird place, with its pitfalls, its sudden rivers, and its vast halls that looked like ornamented excavations and architectural freaks of an age of giants.

"That is Peveril Castle," said Adser, observing Geoffrey looking across the little brook and up the sides of the great limestone cliffs at the square weather-beaten tower perched above them.

"Peveril of the Peak's Castle?"

"Yes, but Zodack Bradford says it was never any more than a fortress, and that Sir Walter Scott knew nowt about the Peak."

"Indeed, I suppose it is not necessary to know a country if you are only making a story about it?"

"Out of your own head?" suggested Adser.

"Just so," Geoffrey replied.

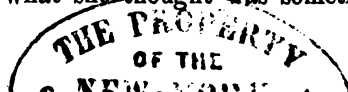
"Zodack says that's how Scott felt about Derbyshire, but not about any other place; owt's considered good enough for Derbyshire, especially the Peak."

"Mr. Bradford seems to say a good deal to you?"

"Oh yes, we have fine talks together; he's a scholar, you know."

"Is he, indeed?"

Adser caught what she thought was something like a



sneer in the amused tone of Geoffrey's remark, and she looked at him with a slight flush beneath her eyes, and stopped to observe in a formal way, "yonder's the cave, just a few steps more."

"But you were going to tell me about Mr. Bradford," said Geoffrey.

"No, I've said enough; I'm only just making you laugh. I don't know how I come to get on talking so, it's not my habit with strangers; but I thought it might be respectful to Duke if I kept you in conversation a bit."

"Laughing, my dear child?" said Geoffrey, "I beg your pardon if while you were thinking of being respectful to the Duke you think I have not been respectful to you. I did not know that I laughed, but if I did it was with pleasure to think that I should get you to introduce me to Mr. Zedack Bradford."

"Is that in Duke's letter?" she asked still in her changed tone and manner, her confidence in the visitor's genuine interest in her conversation unrestored by his laboured explanation.

"No, but I would like to see him at work, and I would like to buy some souvenir of the Peak."

"There's some of his work that he won't sell to anybody," said Adser, looking away from Geoffrey, and seeming to be deeply interested in the strata of limestone rock that now gradually came in sight with its massy front freckled with lichens and with flowers.

"A true artist," Geoffrey answered, contemplating the free and fearless young girl of the Peak. "Art is more beautiful than money."

"This is the cavern," said the girl, indicating the vast open doorway of God's factory, "keep to the right."

"Such is my constant endeavour," said Geoffrey, smiling, as his picturesque and interesting guide strode on ahead with the easy grace of an Egyptian water-carrier.

CHAPTER VIII.

CUPID ON THE BANKS OF THE STYX.

GEOFFREY suddenly found himself in the presence of a massive rock, with a grey front that was wrinkled with Time-worn furrows, but variegated with straggling vegetation and further adorned with flowers that waved gently to and fro in the glowing August air. The sky was perfectly clear above, and against it like a finishing decoration of the enormous rock was a fringe of stunted trees in artistic outline.

In the centre of this pile of limestone there spread out on either hand a stupendous archway. It might have been the portal of some wondrous temple that had been dedicated to the gods in the days when such deities abounded. Or, to seek for a more familiar similarity, it might have been the western front of an ancient cathedral, smitten with age and worn out of all semblance to any distinctive order of architecture. Again, to range the fancies of fiction, it might have been the cave of a magician; for at the very entrance there were files of strange, uncanny looking poles—or “standards” as they are technically called—with cross-like and angular beams from which swung ropes with pendants hanging from them, suggesting gibbets; not realistic gibbets such as one recalls as landmarks in the criminal history of the country, but such as a witch or wizzard might have set up as the gruesome ornaments of a dark and weird retreat.

Geoffrey saw that these gallows-like erections were repeated right and left running away into shadow. There were also wooden guides for ropes and twines, made strangely picturesque with incidents of great twine drums, and wheels of smaller dimensions. Presently entering the cavern he became one of a crowd of people; all busy ex-

cept himself, no witches or magicians, but simple ropemakers plying their trade; a most remarkable sight, he thought, and impressive as it was remarkable.

He observed that the factory was cut off from a higher path by posts and rails; and in a corner on his right was a wooden hut, a roofed-in shanty, at the door of which stood his guide, Adser Blythe. Pausing to take in the general scene, he recognised the girl as its leading figure. The very composition of her surroundings gave her the foremost place in the foreground. She was the one tender bit of colour, it would be no exaggeration to say that she was indeed the one sweet bit of humanity in the picture. This is no disparagement of the women and girls down below her in the ropery; for they no longer belonged to the scene in which Adser was the leading actress. They were cut off from the path to the inner cavern, and the light of the entrance fell upon her in a slanting beam as a very deftly arranged shaft of limelight in a theatrical scene might have rested upon the heroine of a play.

Adser Blythe was a young woman who would have challenged your attention wherever you might have seen her; but here in this strange place she gave a feminine touch to her grim environment that was peculiarly charming. Mr. Jerry Bray was quite right about her taste in dress, or her instinct, one might better say, for the attire that suited her best, not alone in the matter of personal appearance, but as regarded the work she had to perform; for she was a person of many duties. She not only acted as guide to the cavern, but always the first to rise at the Lapidary's cottage, she made the fire, got breakfast ready, and frequently took charge of the museum, let alone having to take miscellaneous lessons from Zodack Bradford. On summer days she helped a friendly farmer in the hay field, was a good hand at wheat harvesting, though there was very little corn growing in the Peak; she had also occasional fits of rambling about the hills, and would bring home trophies of all kinds, nuts, berries, flowers, and geological specimens, some of which Zodack would polish for

her and immortalise. Now and then she would be away for many hours, and return home through the cavern when they thought she had already left that mysterious country underground. Adser knew more about the Devil's Cave than all the historians, geologists and mining engineers put together; but at present that is her secret.

On this August afternoon Geoffrey Lathkill took especial note of her as she stood within the light near the keeper's hut. She was above the medium height of woman. Her head was bare of hat or bonnet. It was well poised upon her shoulders, that were broad but sloping. Her hair was roughly bound up into a knot in her neck. It was a dull red, and there was a crispness in it that betokened a tendency to curl. It was slightly parted in the middle, and came down low upon an open though closely-knit forehead. Her eyes were a deep blue, with dark brows and lashes, and her face had the paleness that is often seen with red hair, though in her case it had none of the waxy appearance that goes with freckles. It was a genuine complexion that many ladies in society endeavour to imitate with bismuth and other artificial washes. The girl's lips were ruddy and her teeth white. Her mouth was a good-tempered mouth. It laughed easily, was sensitive also to a pitiful story, but with a certain firmness that might justly inspire trust and confidence. Her chin was very different in contour from that of our friend Tregarron; it was broad, and at the same time round, not a prominent chin, such as certain modern painters of classic figures love to depict, but a lovable, human, honest chin, belonging to a real womanly face, with a nose not too perfect, having the faintest suggestion of the *retroussé*, and yet not without dignity; one of those noses, in short, that women get old gracefully with, not too prying a nose, not the nose that is eternally poking into other people's business; a nose that was perfectly in harmony with the frank, open, laughing face of one of the loveliest creatures that Geoffrey Lathkill thought he had ever seen.

Adser was dressed in a brown sergo bodice and skirt,

showing a neat pair of ankles, in blue woollen stockings and an equally neat pair of feet in strong tennis shoes. Her dress was slightly open at the neck, and she wore a soft white kerchief. Her waist was loosely clasped by a brown leather belt, fastened with a silver buckle, a present from Zodaack Bradford, who had bought it from a dealer, who in his turn had bought it from an old woman who had taken it from the clasps of an old Bible. Geoffrey did not know this until later; but it is just as well to mention the fact in this place. The general effect of Adser on the not too susceptible male mind would be that of a fine, healthy, good-natured, handsome girl; and this was the effect on the mind of Geoffrey Lathkill on his first introduction to her at the cottage; but here, in the Devil's Cavern, and with the music of God's factory in his ears, she seemed to him something strange and altogether unusual in her beauty. He was artist enough to know that allowance had to be made for accessories; had he not exhibited more than once at the Academy, and was he not often seen at the Salon? But there was something so fine, so innocent, so fearless, so noble in the expression of the countenance generally that later in the day he began to question himself concerning the sensations of what is called love at first sight. It was as if he was awakening from a dream when Adser said, "Now, sir, will you come? Have you anything you would like to leave in the office?"

"Is this the office?" asked Geoffrey, looking into the hut.

"Yes, the visitors' book is in there, and visitors pay for admission, and sign their names; but Mester Mucklethorpe says you're not to be charged, and he's waiting for us yonder."

She pointed to the dark end of the rope-walk, where a small door was open, and a light could be seen glimmering afar off.

Geoffrey, as he followed his guide, observed that not only was she beautiful, but that her voice was not the uneducated voice that had struck him as characteristic of most of the ordinary classes of the Peak people. While she was

not altogether without a dialect, she spoke with a good selection of words, and she pronounced most of them correctly. The breadth that she allowed to her vowels, and her occasional use of *thou* and *thee*, seemed to add distinction to all she said.

Considering that Geoffrey had conversed with women of all classes, colours, and nations, it was odd that he should travel into this humble corner of Derbyshire to find what to his mind was an ideal beauty in the guide to a show-cavern, and the daughter of a drunken rope-maker.

Thrusting a lighted candle in his hand, the nimble-footed guide the next moment stood on a projection of rock above him, and oracularly announced that this was "one of the largest known caverns in the world, extending upwards of two thousand two hundred feet into the mountain, and dipping to six hundred below its summit, the grand natural archway forming the entrance being forty-two feet high and one hundred and twenty wide."

Guides, animate and inanimate, take delight always in figures. Adser Blythe had learnt the lesson from her predecessor. The original story had come down from the most primitive guides to "the she native of the place," who led Thomas Hobbes, of Malmesbury, through the cavern some two hundred odd years ago. It is not a little curious that in his day the guide should have been a handsome girl,

"Who with her stately foot and accent clear
As guide emboldens us with many a cheer."

Tradition and usage are everything in the Peak. A girl was among the guides who piloted Queen Victoria through the cavern before her Majesty's marriage, and rowed her over the dark waters of the Derbyshire Styx while a brass band played "God save the Queen." It would interest her Majesty in these latter days to hear her faithful subjects in the Peak tell strangers all about this great event; how the Queen stooped with the rest under the dark subterranean arch and lay down like any other mortal while the

boat was pushed through the tunnel into the semi-darkness beyond.

"Follow me, please," said Adser Blythe, as she dashed ahead of the enraptured visitor, to emerge into the first spacious opening of the cavern.

"This," said Adser, in her oracular manner, "is called the Bell House; on the other side of this spacious hall, and which we shall cross, is a stream of water fourteen feet in width. This used to be traversed in a boat. Visitors had to lie flat on their backs while it was rowed through. There was first a low arch to go under; you had to crawl through it; her Majesty Queen Victoria when she visited the Peak inspected this cavern and made the excursion beneath the archway, and in the boat over what is called the River Styx. If you hold your light down you can see the remains of the old boat in which the Queen was ferried."

Geoffrey lowered his guttering double candle and noted the decaying timbers of a punt. Turning to make a remark, he saw his guide's light some distance ahead. He heard her say "be careful, bend your head," and when he had done so he was in another spacious opening, having a roof that was black with weird shadows.

"This magnificent hall," said the guide, whose face was illuminated by the light of a candle held above her head, "is two hundred and twenty feet in length, two hundred broad, and a hundred and twenty feet high. The sound you hear is that of the river that takes its rise in this stupendous cavern, and this is the chief water supply of Castleton. In wet and stormy weather it rises to a great height, completely filling the cavern, and rendering it wholly impassable, leaving behind a deposit of mud, or fine sand, such as you will observe on either side of you embanked. It is this fine material that lapidaries use for their best work in polishing. This opening is called 'The Grand Saloon,' or 'Pluto's Hall,' and if you will put out your light and stand where you are for a minute you shall see it illuminated;" whereupon she pursed her lips and

whistled a signal to "Mester Mucklethorpe," who was waiting in a well-chosen corner with a pan of blue fire.

Before Geoffrey could pay Adser the compliment that was on his lips, she had blown out her candle and disappeared. Her voice, as it commanded "put out your light, please," sounding afar off, though it was only a few feet above him.

When all of a sudden the subterranean hall was illuminated, Geoffrey saw a wild excavation with natural steps here and there and pieces of rock and stalactites in impressive confusion, and a broken roof that appeared to have no end. The blue fire with its illuminated smoke being extinguished, Adser was by his side. He did not know it until he heard her voice.

"Let me light your candle, please," she said.

She little dreamed to what extent she had lighted the candle of his imagination and how brightly it was burning, how it flashed up when she spoke, how entranced he was under the spell of her voice in this strange subterranean world.

"Oh, thank you," was all he could say at the moment as Adser struck a common lucifer match and relighted the two candles, which he carried like a cheap torch.

"Follow me, please," she said.

"I certainly will," he answered, "but wait one moment."

"There is no danger," she said, "it is all plain sailing now."

"But there is much danger," said Geoffrey, "where did you get that soft sweet voice?"

Adser was accustomed to compliments, and from the moment that she had thought Geoffrey was quizzing her, she had kept a check upon her words and manner, though she had been very careful in her pronunciation—her elocution, as Zodack Bradford named it—on this special occasion as much in honour of the Duke's letter as for the reason that she had an instinctive desire to please the distinguished-looking young fellow, with whom at first she was inclined to gossip and chat in her most free and easy manner. Her

only response to Geoffrey's question about her voice was her signal-whistle to Mucklethorpe, a little trill of a few notes that went echoing through the cavern like the cry of a bird. In response Geoffrey saw tiny lights appear one after the other like the lamps of a dim city in zigzag fashion, one here, another there, and then in rows as you may see the gaslamps shimmer when the lamplighters are busy in the wintry quarters of an old town. Adser went on with her tiny flame as if to join in this pretty twinkling of lamps, presently, however, to pause and announce the next feature of interest.

"This is Roger Rain's house, so called from the continual dripping of water which you notice; but we will continue, please; you won't like to be kept standing in the wet."

This last remark was made by way of an apology as she passed to the "Chancel" and "Orchestra."

"Some folk call it the chancel only; and what they call the orchestra I call the choir. Give me your hand."

Once more she was by his side, he hardly knew how, and she was leading him to a point where he could best see the natural beauties of the place known as the Victoria Hall; and Adser knew more about it and the strange place and the strange headways and incidents of the upper strata of the rock than any other living soul. Many a search had been made by engineers, antiquarians, friends of Mucklethorpe and agents of the Duke of Devonshire to find the secret way that it was said had existed between the Castle of Peveril and the Devil's Hole; but none of them had penetrated to a point that Adser knew; and Mucklethorpe always declared that the men in armour in the old days would never have gone further than the rock under which the Queen had been conducted and out on the other side upon an underground river. Adser, by the way, had forgotten to inform Mr. Geoffrey Lathkill that the rock had been blasted for a passage-way since the Queen's girlhood. The cave was too full of ghosts and devilries, Mucklethorpe argued, in the days when men fought in metal coats for any of Peveril's men to have persevered into the furthest recess-

ses of the Devil's Hole, with the awful sound of underground rivers and fiends' cauldrons in their ears. "They worked a way into the cavern!" he would say, scornfully, "might as well say they took a bath in bottomless pit of Speedwell mine where the river out o' Devil's Hole falls like ten thousand catterax, and into which miners for years and years chucked their stuff, thousand o' tons, and not made a jot o' difference."

The recollections of Mucklethorpe as the guide set Adser off into a little fit of merry laughter that sounded almost uncanny in the dark passage they were threading, with here and there about them the splash of many waters.

"I must come one day and hear him," Geoffrey replied.

"Do; it is as good as a Punch and Judy show," said Adser, adding in another tone of voice altogether, "this spot is called the Devil's Hole" (projecting her candle into the entrance of a dark cavity), "and now we are coming to the Half-Way House. Stand here and Mucklethorpe will light it up."

She whistled, and almost at once the place was aglow with blue fires and red, to be followed by intense darkness.

"You whistle wonderfully," said Geoffrey, but there was no response to his remark. Adser had disappeared. She not only knew the cavern by heart, but could run every step of it blindfolded, and she was as light of foot as a gazelle.

"Stay where you are one moment," she said, and bounding down a steep descent, her light in her hand, she made Geoffrey's torch twinkle once more, and, remarking "now we come to the finest sight of all," took hold upon the sleeve of his coat and led him forward.

"You are the finest sight of all I have seen yet," said Geoffrey, beginning to feel once more at home with the girl.

"Oh, I dare say," she answered, with a laugh.

"I am in earnest," said Geoffrey.

"Of course you are," she answered, in a tone of banter.

"Now you are going to whistle for the lights," he said.

"Don't for a moment. I like your whistle in itself, but I prefer to hear you talk, and when you whistle you go off and leave me."

They were pushing their way over a rough path, crossing narrow branches of the Styx, and shouldering mighty banks of detritus, and ever ahead of them now glittered and twinkled, and went out and reappeared, the torch of Mucklethorpe, the "*deus machina*" of the illuminatory effects which Adser loved to whistle up, like the stage manager giving signals to the prompter for raising curtains.

"But talking is wasting the old man's time, and there may be other visitors that want to see the place, and you've got it all to yourself, because you know the Duke. Have you been staying with the Duke?" she asked, her inquisitiveness coming to Geoffrey's conversational assistance.

"Yes, I've been shooting at Chatsworth, or rather over the Stanage Moors, with a party—the Duke and his friends."

"Have you, indeed? It's a grand place, Chatsworth! I can't think how folks can make up their minds to live in it, though. I couldn't for shame sit down and eat my dinner with all those grand pictures looking on, and taking a chair among such splendid things! How did you feel like in that dining-room? But there, I daresay you're used to that kind of living."

"Oh no, I am not," said Geoffrey, "though I have seen life of that kind, and visited at palaces in all parts of the world."

"Have you now!" she remarked, pausing to look at him; "but have you ever seen anything as grand as Chatsworth?"

"Well, yes, I think so; but, as you say, it is a very beautiful place."

"Did you see that table that's made of Blue John? Eh, but that's a wonder! Zodack says it's worth an awful lot of money, because you see Blue John mine is getting worked out. Zodack's made things that's prettier to look

on, I think, and after all, what a thing's worth isn't all the world, is it?"

"No," said Geoffrey, "there are many lovely things that are not of intrinsic value."

"Cum, cum, Adser Blythe," said a voice from a remote point above them, "doant waste gentleman's toime, cos I want to hev him see t' cavern from end t' end."

"Very well," shouted Adser in reply; "get your fires ready."

"Is that old Mucklethorpe?" asked Geoffrey.

"Yes," said Adser, starting on ahead; "you see we are going to take you to the river at the end; we don't show ordinary folk more than the Victoria Hall. And this is it; you can breathe again here; put out your light."

"But don't go away," said Geoffrey, "old Mucklethorpe wants no help."

"Very well," said the girl, and Geoffrey noticed that there was quite a musical cadence in the way in which she let fall those often-used, conceding, and conciliating words, "Very well;" it was her "Yes," her general affirmative, and Geoffrey was not the first who had noticed the music of it.

While Geoffrey was thinking of this sweet "very well," Adser let off her sibilant signal; this time it was a kind of military call, a whistling reveille, "in honour of the Queen," as she said laughingly in reply to a remark that she had different signals.

"Excuse me one minute," she said, darting up a steep declivity as the Bengal fires began to expose in brilliant hues the lurid crags of this vast stony apartment named after the Queen in honour of her girlish visit to the cavern. Nature has constructed the place entirely of limestone. The strata is rife with marine remains intersected with chert. When lighted it has been likened to a scene from Dante's Inferno.

Away up among the crags that stood out in the smoky light of distant fires Geoffrey saw Adser by the side of another figure. He was rather reminded of Goethe than of Dante. Adser looked like Marguerite on the Brocken,

Mucklethorpe like one of its evil spirits. Geoffrey shuddered at the passing thought, and said, "God forbid that she should ever meet such a fate!" And as the sudden prayer dropped from his lips he was once more in darkness, through which, however, came the cheerful voice of his guide. "That was fine, wasn't it?"

"Indeed it was," he answered, and she once more stood by his side as if she had swung herself down from a mountain gorge.

"The spot you are standing on is where Queen Victoria stood when the band up yonder played the 'Old Hundredth.' I've often thought it must have been grand to hear them playing that fine old hymn to the Queen of England."

Adser was unbending once under the courtly and respectful manner of her visitor.

"It must have been very fine," said Geoffrey, as his eyes wandered to the furthest end of the chancel, where a row of candles marked the locality of what Adser called the choir, but what was generally known as the Orchestra.

"Thank you, Mr. Mucklethorpe," said Adser, and at once the lights began to disappear, and Adser walked a little way in front of the visitor.

"Do you often make these journeys through the cavern?" Geoffrey asked, in something of a sympathetic tone.

"Oh, yes, many a time a day, when the excursion folk throng upon us," she said.

"Don't you get very tired of it?"

"No, it amuses me. Besides, I'm paid for it. Old Mucklethorpe is a decent sort; and you see I am not obliged to do it; I just please myself, not like his daughter as had to do it whether she felt like it or not. Mucklethorpe has to be guide himself sometimes; you should hear him!"

"Is he funny?"

"Rather. He goes at it as if he was having a row with folks. He doesn't mean it, of course; he's rather amiable than otherwise; gives folks things; gathers mushrooms, never eats them himself; I believe he is a downright good man, old Mucklethorpe."

"I'm glad to hear it; he gave me some mushrooms."

"Did he, though? Well, that is curious, and you'd only just seen him."

"No, but where are you going now?"

"Oh, a little further; stoop!"

"To conquer?" said Geoffrey, bending his head, and following his guide.

"Folks have to stoop in this world," said Adser, and then Mucklethorpe appeared.

"This, sir," he said, "is t' end of t' cavern; step ovver the watter careful; that's it; yo'll find it a bit slippery; mind yer head there, that's ole reight; we nivver bring visitors as fur as this; but we've just gotten to show yo consarn reight through."

They stood by an underground river, that went rushing along at their feet. It was not in any sense a terrible sight; nothing like the bottomless pit of the Speedwell whither it was bound, and into which, according to Mucklethorpe, you might chuck the entire Peak country, and it 'ud mek no difference.

"And now yo've seen all we'n gotten to show yo," said Mucklethorpe, "and I mun go on and let other folk in. Adser will bring yo to t' office, so as yo can sign your name; and I can only say as any other time yo may like to see t' place yo're welcome."

Left alone with Adser, Geoffrey frequently lagged behind to induce her to lengthen out the return journey, but she said it was only fair to Mester Mucklethorpe that she should get on and help him with the visitors that would now be sure to be waiting.

At the office Geoffrey signed his name, and Adser said, "Good-bye, sir."

"No, not good-bye," said Geoffrey, "I shall see you again; I am staying at the Castle Inn for a day or two; besides, I want to make a few purchases from Mrs. Blythe. Won't you show me Mr. Zodack Bradford's masterpieces?"

"To-morrow, perhaps," said Adser.

"I shall rely upon you, then."

"Very well," said Adser, looking up into his face with a smile that set his heart beating.

"Won't you shake hands?" he said.

"Very well," she replied, in a soft voice and laying her hand in his.

"For the present, then, good-bye," he said.

"Now, Adser, lass, cum, here's a party waitin' for yo!" Adser hurried away.

"Good-bye, sir, and thank yo," said Mucklethorpe.

"Good-day, Mr. Mucklethorpe, and thank you," said Geoffrey. "I have no doubt the mushrooms will be very good. I'm going to have them for lunch, I believe."

"Cook'd in t' oven in drippin pan wi' plenty o' butter an' some pepper an' salt and lightest sprinklin' o' flour, they're not to be beaten," said Mucklethorpe.

"You are an epicure," Geoffrey replied; "you must come and have a glass of wine at the Castle."

"Thank yo, sir; I'm too busy just now; thank yo all t' same."

"Good-day, then," said Geoffrey, once more looking back to see if Adser was in sight, but the cavern looked dark and melancholy. She had disappeared. The ropers were busy with their wheels and drums and their spinning, and the brook was dancing along outside the cave. Geoffrey strolled leisurely along the declivity, avoiding the Lapidary's cottage, which Mrs. Blythe observing called to him.

"To-morrow, Mrs. Blythe," he said. "I am going to stay here some time; I will look in to-morrow."

"Thank yo, sir," said Nanny, and Geoffrey went on to meet as he entered the town his driver from Buxton.

"You can put in your horses, Larry," said Geoffrey.

"Ole reight, sir."

"I am not returning, however. I want you to go and fetch my luggage."

"Oh," said the driver, with an expression of sudden inquiry. "The Castle seems to be a good inn?"

"Oh yes, it's first rate. I am going to stay at the Castle a day or two, the village interests me."

"It does most visitors," said Larry; "but do yo want me to come back with the luggage to-neet?"

"Why yes, certainly," said Geoffrey.

"It's a long drive to go and come back."

"Here's a sovereign to shorten it," said Geoffrey.

"Thank yo, sir," said Larry, "that does shorten it by a sight!"

"And here's a ten-pound note; pay my bill and bring me the change; tell the landlord I shall be back at the Lion again one of these days soon."

"Thank yo, sir; yes, sir," said Larry, touching his hat, "yo're something like a gentleman."

"Thank you," said Lathkill, with a smile and a bow.

"Not at all, sir," said Larry. "I dursay I can get back wi' bay mare and gig before yo've had yore dinner, that is, if yo tek it at supper toime, as most gentlemen do."

"No doubt," said Lathkill, taking out a pocket-book and writing a message, "and I want you to give this to my man."

"Yes, sir," said Larry.

"I am not returning to-night," he wrote; "take the next train to town; pack one of my large easels and a few canvasses, bring my colour-box, some brushes, my small tent, and pack a hamper of champagne (Jorrock's—if there is not enough, go to the wine merchant's), and come to the Castle here; Larry, the Lion driver, will tell you how to get here; bring some clothes if you think necessary; I shall stay here probably for a month."

Tearing out the leaf upon which he had scribbled these instructions, folding up the missive, and turning down a corner of it, he addressed it to "Mr. Perrywick."

"There, Larry, give that to my man Perrywick; he is going to London for some things I want; tell him how to get there, and see him off by the very first train to town."

"I will, sir," said Larry; "is there anything else I can do for yo?"

"Nothing; away you go, Larry."

And away Larry went accordingly.

CHAPTER IX.

GEOFFREY LIGHTS A FRESH CIGAR.

THERE is a physiognomy of towns and villages, as there is of men and women, and a physiognomy of houses. Castleton is a village with a seriousness of its own. It looks at you suspiciously from behind whitey-brown blinds. When it begins to make your acquaintance it opens its doors and invites you in. When you know it well, you find out its back gardens with flowers in them, and the cosy corners of its neighbouring homesteads.

Woodruffe, the senior roper, is like the village, dull but honest. His pleasures lie in whatever sunshine still remains in his memory. Zodack Bradford has a touch of Castleton's uncompromising plainness, but his smile is like its floral window-sills. As if the village knew how stony it is and desired to compromise the matter with its visitors, it offers the tribute of a nosegay.

Adser Blythe interprets all Castleton's poetic possibilities with a rough edge upon them; Sol Tidser its November gloom and its wintry blasts, and the eccentricity of its local streams that start up and disappear into strange tunnels underground, and hide in weird caverns, to come forth again miles away as crystal brooks with trout basking on their pebbly shallows.

Tregarron had absorbed into his personality the wildness of the local hills and dales, and something of the romance that belongs to mountainous countries and lonely corners of the world in which history has been made with the help of swords and battle-axes. Upon his romantic nature had fallen, however, the shadow of political and philosophic speculation, that carried away many of his best impulses, like Mam Tor shivering itself to pieces, as you may see it any day from the highway that leads to Buxton.

There was in Tregarron's mental constitution a reflection

of the contradictory character, the strange contrasts of beauty and barrenness, of frowning rock, and soft and flowery hollows, that belong to the scenery of the Peak; and he was, both in his politics and his ambition, just as uncertain and as inconsequential as the local waters, here, there, and everywhere, now underground, now above, now sweet and limpid and tender, now stormy, passionate, and full of anger. His sheet anchor was his love of Adser Blythe, but his anchor dragged, and continually threatened shipwreck.

Scarthin Blythe was typical of the Derbyshire moorlands; fair, if rough to look at, with suggestions of pleasant paths and running streams, but full of treachery, beset with bogs, and puddled with the hidden springs of vast water-sheds. He was a traitor to God and man; and yet he managed to hide the rocks and shoals, the bogs and pitfalls, of his disposition beneath a pretence of virtue; so bilberry bushes and bracken and heather will oftentimes flourish above a hollow place that tempts unwary feet to trustfulness, and ends in grief. Scarthin Blythe had experienced none of the ennobling influences that had stirred many a visitor while passing through the Gate of the Winds; he was a truculent, greedy money-hoarder, not to say something worse, as the reader knows who remembers Jessop Blythe's last night in Castleton.

It was a good stroke of business for the master of the Travellers' Rest to call upon Mrs. Blythe the very next day and tell her that he had cancelled the mortgage she and Jessop had given him; that she owed him nothing, and that Jessop had gone forth equally free so far as he was concerned. Since then his relations had seen as little of him as before, though he had managed somehow to cultivate a hatred of that unlucky wight Lewis Tregarron, who, for some strange reason or other—a dream, an omen, a curious look of Tregarron's, or a misunderstood remark of Zodack Bradford's—he believed to be in possession of Jessop Blythe's secret of the absconding clerk of Glossop. But we must not get away from that consideration of the peculiar char-

acteristics of Castleton and its romantic history that seem desirable in the present section of this story of the Peak. Castleton bears upon its face and in its manners ample traces of its relationship to all the other towns and villages of North Derbyshire.

It is built of stone. The material does not soften with the weather as the stones of Venice have done. It does not crumble like the Caen stone. It takes on itself no artistic tone after the manner of St. Paul's. The chisel-marks of the mason are observable in its oldest fronts. Wind and rain have made their impress upon houses and walls, but the hard strong characteristics remain. The flowers in the cottage windows, the blossoms in the hall gardens emphasize this; and the effect is not hilarious. Derbyshire makes you reflective rather than mirthful. The general impression of the Peak scenery is wild and sombre; it lacks foliage, it suggests inhospitable valleys and stormy hills. In the heart of it, however, there are pleasant dales, and beneath the brusque and often forbidding manners of the people there are warm and tender hearts. As a race the Derbyshire men and women are worthy of the British name and fame. The men have been foremost in battle, the women first among the world's self-sacrificing nurses.

The village has a history that goes back into the storm and stress of the earliest wars of invaded hearths. The Roman posts may still be traced on its surrounding hills, where the remains of military encampments break out into fairy circles and grassy steps. In these Northern lands the Britons were not easily dislodged from fastnesses that in later times saw the fierce struggles that marked the rise of the Mercian kingdom and again at the dispersion of the Saxon nobles, and onwards through the tragic romances of the Middle Ages in the reigns of Henry II. and John and Henry III., with the fall of the barons at Chesterfield. Since those days the Peak has contributed its full quota to the fighting men of England in every *corner of the earth*, while pioneering great enterprises at

home and beyond the seas. Nevertheless, here is Castleton left high and dry like some dead seaport alone with her history and her two hand industries of twine and stone cutting, her ancient church, and her day-old newspapers from the metropolis.

Having taken rooms and a soda-and-brandy at the hotel, Geoffrey Lathkill lighted a cigar and proceeded to survey the town. He found everything stonily characteristic. There was first and foremost the village shop, which had supplemented its general wares of chocolate, toffy, marbles, peppermints, nuts, birdseed, tobacco pipes, mustard, pills, starch, shuttlecocks, and fishing-rods with the latest coloured show cards of the most advertised commodities, and piles of penny and two-penny novels in coloured covers depicting the wildest adventures of American detectives, bushrangers, pirates of the sea, and swell mobsmen of the land. As he passed, Sol Tidser was sitting on the shop floor, deep in one of the showiest of the "penny dreadfuls." Geoffrey caught no more than a mere glimpse of Sol, but it passed through his mind that the little monstrosity might make a characteristic model for the Hunchback of Notre Dame, or the crooked hero of some other of the startling stories that were evidently popular in the out-of-the-world town of Castleton. He looked into the Nag's Head, where he found three solemn fellows watching a game of whist in the bar. The Wheat Sheaf was busy starting off an excursion party in a break and four, noisy workmen from some distant town. Otherwise the place was quiet and sedate. Not far from the Wheat Sheaf there was the lapidary's shop that rivalled Blythe's, with very much the same selection of bric-à-brac. Further away was the church, square and stony. The cottages near by were similar in their squareness and solidity, square doorways, square windows, with square panes, steps rubbed with yellowstone; in some instances the jambs of the doors similarly coloured; here and there a preference was given to white. Yellow roses were climbing up some of the fronts. In many of the windows there

were geraniums, red and pink, the latter mostly creepers. Here and there the canariensis flourished about window sills and over doorways that were invariably open. The interiors contradicted the general stoniness. Women were sitting by the clean hearth-stones, knitting, preparing tea, or giving the last touches to tidying up for the day. Now and then, in corners and bye-ways, the mysterious stream from the cavern—the Styx, no doubt—crept along its time-worn channel, chattering over stones, murmuring in little pools, then slipping back into the earth to reappear in a sunny scramble of bubbles and foam far away in the valley below.

One of the tidiest little places Geoffrey noticed was house and shop all in one. Its doors were wide open. Your eye traversed a long strip of oil-cloth that went right through the house. It began at the shop door and ended in a back room, with a fireplace full of tall flowers and bulrushes, and upon the hearth could be seen the shadow of an easy-chair and a trembling figure. In the shop window were a few curios, bits of china, an old Moorish pistol, a pair of brightly-polished plated candlesticks, a dozen or so well-bound books, a set of dish covers, an engraving by Bartolozzi, a few specimens of Derbyshire spa, and a couple of brass warming-pans. Geoffrey strolled into the shop where he found himself among a miscellaneous collection of furniture, fire-irons, kitchen utensils, an old piano, a few quaint chairs, several bundles of rugs and carpets; and everything as clean and polished as soap and leather and emery powder and elbow grease could make it. A quiet little woman, dressed in a buff Quakerish gown, bade him good-day, and Geoffrey, finding himself interested in the shadow that trembled on the hearth-stone, made the acquaintance of old Tidser, the paralytic. Tidser turned his head slightly, and Mrs. Tidser explained that her husband had been affected nearly all his life. Geoffrey's curiosity being satisfied, he returned to the shop and made a few trifling purchases, and led the woman into talking about herself and her family. He found to his amazement that for some strange reason

or other when she was very young she had married this stricken person, and he could not help thinking that after all there was a good deal in the theory that some people should not be allowed to marry, when Sol Tidser, whom he had seen devouring a book at the other miscellaneous shop in the village, crossed his path. Just as he was about to quit the Tidser store, he said, "Young man, are you Mrs. Tidser's son?"

"I am old Tidser's dog, who's dog are you?" Sol replied, with a grin on his sinister face.

"I thought so," said Geoffrey, turning on his heel, "what could that poor little woman be thinking of to marry that doddering old image; how easily the world is populated—what a world it would be, by Jove, if Caliban was in the ascendant; but what a glorious world it might be if the mothers were all like that girl of the cavern, given the right kind of fathers, of course."

He lighted a fresh cigar, and walked back in the direction of the Lapidary's cottage, and the girl with the deep blue eyes, the free swinging gait, the merry tongue, and the fine figure, still held his thoughts. The more he smoked the more he continued to see her in his imagination.

CHAPTER X.

LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT, OR WHAT?

GEOFFREY thought he knew women; he thought he knew himself. He had taken pride in his self-control. Many a time when he had heard of fellows whom he knew making fools of themselves over women, he said to himself, "Geoffrey, my boy, you know better than that," and the truth was he did; not that he was cold or indifferent to women; not that he was unendowed by Nature with the strong passions of his sex, but he was intellectually a strong man, he had authority over his feelings and his desires. It is

the weak man who comes to grief. The strong man looks a passion or a dangerous possibility in the face, as a soldier looks into the mouth of an enemy's guns. It does not follow that the man who keeps out of scrapes with women, who never falls a victim to the snares of Venus, is indifferent to the charms of the sex; the rule is that he is strong enough to control his passion. Geoffrey Lathkill was that man; at least so he thought, and indeed so he had proved to be through all his adventurous and free and easy life; but he found himself in a flutter of anxious thought over this village nobody, this guide to a show-cavern, this orphan of a questionable parentage. His fancy idealised the orphan and the guide, and elevated the nobody into a misplaced genius, a garden flower among weeds, a divinely endowed child of nature.

"Love at first sight," he said to himself, musing as he walked on once more in the direction of the Lapidary's cottage, "love for the first time, in fact!" and then he bade himself be cautious, and glanced back over certain affairs that might have been counted as what men and women call "conquests," and which with some men would have led to no end of trouble, and probably of heart-break and remorse. But this woman of the Peak had all in a moment got into his heart as well as his brain, just as completely as Cinderella in the story was metaphorically fired into the very soul of the Prince, who from that moment languished for the love that was willing to give up a throne for the wifely companionship of a far more humble little person than our Adser Blythe; for there was no morganatic desires on the part of His Royal Highness; his love was fair and above board, and so was the admiration of Geoffrey Lathkill for the pretty drudge of the Lapidary's cottage. While the idea of marriage had not yet entered into the romance of his visit to the Peak, no base thought tainted his admiration for "that lass o' Cavedale," as some of the Castleton folk called her, when they did not speak of her as "Jessop Blythe's lass," or "yonder stuck-up wench o' Blythe's," for, although Adser was a general favourite, there were a few

kindly women-folk to give variety to her popularity. At present Geoffrey hardly knew what to make of himself or his new sensations. Anyhow he had already resolved not to return to Buxton at present; he would certainly see more of Castleton, the cavern, the ropery, and Adser Blythe while he was on the spot.

As he rambled on, smoking, thinking, and noting the things he saw, he found himself observing that most of the Castleton cottages displayed in their windows intimations that tea and coffee were provided for visitors, or hot water in the event of visitors providing their own tea and coffee, in which case attendance was proffered. Several houses gave notice that they had apartments to let; and almost at the entrance of Cavedale he paused before a somewhat picturesque house with the double legend of "The Laurels" and "To Let Furnished—with attendance if desired," modestly displayed on one of the gate-posts, the other in the front window, half hidden by the trees and shrubs of a pretty front garden.

It was a quaint though simple house with iron gates and a small carriage-way that was flanked with lauristinus and other shrubs. It was of the Queen Anne or old Kensington style of architecture, and built of brick—something quite unique in its way contrasted with the usual stone houses of the Peak. The gate-posts were of painted wood—the tone a faded blue—with ornamental pediments. On the right-hand post in small gold letters was written the name of the house.

Let into the other gate-post was a bell-handle. Geoffrey pulled it. Presently there came tripping down through the lauristinus a neatly-dressed servant girl.

"This house is to let?"

"Yes, sir," said the girl.

"Do you go with it?" Geoffrey asked in what Castleton would consider his high-and-mighty London way.

"I don't know, sir," said the girl, blushing.

"I mean are the servants left with the furniture?"

"It depends if the servants like the tenant that comes

to take the furniture," said the girl, with the soft accent of the South.

"Of course," said Lathkill; "can I see the house?"

"No doubt," said the girl, "Mrs. Midwinter is at home."

"Is Mrs. Midwinter your mistress?"

"Yes."

"And the owner of the house?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then please say a gentleman would like to see 'The Laurels.'"

"Yes, sir," said the girl, "come this way, please."

She led the way to the house. The door was open. The maid conducted Geoffrey through a spacious hall—with a fireplace in it, and several articles of furniture, an old oak chest, a spinnet, several cases of fish and birds, and a map of the world—into a small room with a window overlooking a corner of an old-fashioned garden full of mignonette, French marigolds and roses.

"Good day, sir," said Mrs. Midwinter, a middle-aged lady in a brown silk dress and bertha, "you wish to see the house?"

"Yes, madam," said Geoffrey, "I am a bachelor, but I like a private house better than an hotel; moreover, I want a room large enough to paint in; that is for the time being to convert into a studio; I have my own man; I was asking your maid if furnished meant service as well!"

"You mean do the servants stay?"

"Yes, and is there a housekeeper?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Midwinter.

"And a cook?"

"Yes," she said, "I'm the housekeeper and the cook."

"Oh, indeed."

"Then I think that would be satisfactory."

"I've had families of Dukes' agents, and one year Lord and Lady Melford, and the Laurels has always had a character for comfort and good cooking."

"May I see the house?"

"I don't know that I've ever had a bachelor mek inquiry about the house."

"No?" said Geoffrey.

"I should want references."

"Of course you would," Geoffrey replied, "and I would give you the very best, besides your rent in advance, if I should like the place."

"It isna the money I'm thinking on," said Mrs. Midwinter, "but come this way. The room we're in is breakfast-room, or small parlour. This is dining-room t'other side the hall, and opposite's the drawing-room."

She led the way into the drawing-room, which smelt of lavender and pot-pourri. It was lighted with three windows, one of which Mrs. Midwinter proceeded to open, letting in a pleasant breeze. She stood by the window inviting Geoffrey to look out into the garden, that was approached by a glass door at the further end of the room. It was a little paradise of box-edged flower-beds, red daisies, larkspurs, tulips, turk's-cap lilies, ranunculuses, mig-nonette, dwarf nasturtiums, lobelia, and against the wall that shut it in rows of holyhocks and hedges of roses.

"It's a south wall, and we can grow almost anything against it," said Mrs. Midwinter, "as we can on the bed nearest it; it's a shaded garden as you see."

"It is beautiful," said Geoffrey, "and who is the gardener?"

"Well, my husband laid it in as you may say twenty year ago, and sin he deed I've been my own gardener."

"You are a very industrious woman," said Geoffrey.

"Oh, I don't know; things come easy when you've gotten a bit o' method."

"Now, this room, Mrs. Midwinter, I should want to change the furnishing a bit; I would do no damage. I should want to put up an easel and——"

"I know exactly what you'd want if you're a painter," she said. "I had a great man here one season, was what you call a Royal Academician, and he altered things, but he was pleasant and kind ovver it, and give me a

portrait of myself, which I'll show you when we come to still room."

"Very well, madam; then I think I will finish my survey to-morrow. I feel sure I shall like it; let us sit down now and discuss the terms, and we will give each other until to-morrow to decide, eh? You can consider my references, and I can consider the terms, don't you think so?"

"Certainly, sir."

"And I am to have the refusal of the Laurels, with service and the whole thing, until to-morrow at ten o'clock?"

"Yes." And thereupon they sat down to talk the matter over.

"Might as well settle down here for a few months as anywhere else," Geoffrey said to himself, as he strolled back to the hotel; "it promises to be interesting; very nice old lady, an excellent cook, I'm sure. One could dream oneself back into the last century sitting in the garden. Don't wonder at old Stubbs, R. A., liking the place; just the shop for him; full of properties, too. The spinnet and the framed fish, I'll be bound, have done duty in many of his sentimental old-world pictures, as the critics call them; 'Forgotten,' for example, who has not seen the popular print, lady of Queen Anne period sitting at spinnet and suggesting that she had forgotten him or her, with bit of background, old engraving on wall, and a high-backed chair; or 'Come out, 'tis now September,' a group in baronial hall, with details of fish in frames, stuffed birds, buck's antlers, and so on. Dear old Stubbs, nothing like appealing to the great middle class! Glad I'm not a painter, only a dauber; would hate to know that I had filled cheap shop-windows with 'Come out, 'tis now,' or 'Who will o'er,' or 'Puppy, how's your mother?' or 'The Letter.' By Jove, though, what a picture that young lady guide would make! What a picture! Yes, I might just as well get into the Laurels and try a bit of country housekeeping; it will be a rest and an experience. I can do some work, paint a lot, get the natives to sit, get Adser Blythe to sit; might do worse than give Arty those reminiscences of the Soudan

and the Nile that I have promised him any time these two years."

Arty was the editor of a pretentious magazine that loved celebrities and contributors who did not write for money. While he was thinking in this wise, Geoffrey's conscience might have been a sentient and palpable individuality walking by his side, so conciliatory was he towards it. He knew, and his conscience knew, that neither Castleton nor Arty, the editor of a certain pretentious publication, nor the finishing of certain sketches, had anything whatever to do with his proposal to remain for some time in this dull town of Castleton. "What's this dull town to me?" he might have sung—with the woman who pathetically apostrophised Robin Adair—when Adser Blythe was the attraction. Why not frankly own it? The secret was his own. But his view of it was confused. He would get her to sit for him. His *raison d'être* in the Peak should be that of the artist. He had always found that among the highest and the lowliest an artist's studio was an attractive retreat, and that from the studio itself it was only a step to the platform either for a portrait or a study. Once there, conversation became easy and friendship followed. Let it be understood at once that Lathkill, as men go, was a good fellow; not a man of intrigue, no Lovelace, but only a bachelor without responsibilities, and with the very faintest attachment to keep his respect for women in decent order. Her name was Madeline White; but the affair lapsed; it had not been formally broken off. He and she had somehow drifted apart; she had eccentric views of a woman's duty, and he had no sympathy with the kind of mission Madeline affected. She was rich, however, and as uncontrolled by parents as he was; the heiress to a large estate and with a well-secured income. She was the last of a family that had been distinguished in English history. Her house on the upper Thames was a favourite halting-place for antiquarian societies; its founder was a crusader, and his banneret still held together in white and gold and blood-red cross among the relics of hard-fought fields under the Black Prince. Made-

line had inherited the romantic enthusiasm of her ancestors, and it had taken a direction that was similar in its arrogant benevolence in so far as her ambition contemplated the evangelisation of the world. But she had a certain obstinate streak in her constitution that made her impatient of discipline and rebellious to control. So, like Zodack Bradford, she had practically said she would give up all the creeds and disputes and cling to the Church. She did not, of course, know Zodack, but this was one of his sayings. He had at one time been a Methodist, and then a Unitarian, and finally he joined the Church, for he thought it well to set a good example, and the majority of people must have some kind of religion to hold on to; when he was questioned upon the matter, Zodack had said, "Oh, well, I've come to the conclusion to be a freethinker, so I've joined the Church; the Establishment doesna bother yo; it gives yo a margin; and yo need never repeat the Athanasian creed; Hammersley, the curate, says he doesna believe in it, and thinks authorities should blot it out; if he, who has made vows to stand by it, can satisfy his conscience that way, why I'm all right; and there's no howling and tambourining i' the Church; and even vicar is willin' to argue with a man; but yonder Salvationists, that shout themsens hoarse i' Buxton Market Place, they won't even mek hell a matter of debate; they stick to it with its brimstone and fire, and its gnashing of teeth, and all the old cabal; and the more they feel themsens saved, the more they go in for hell for you and me and other outsiders. So long as the Church lets me argue, and doesn't pin me down to a wholly God-inspired Bible, why I'm content to go to afternoon service, where there's no sermon, and I can tek in the poetry of th' lessons and prayers and such like."

Madeline was a Churchwoman on far more orthodox grounds than these, but she hankered after the show and display of the Salvationists; liked the marching and the singing; had an inspiration for preaching the gospel to the heathen. To her the heathen were the poor and needy; to *her the heathen* were the loafers in market-places, idle

women, ignorant men; and she had some vague notion of a Peter the Hermit in petticoats, not a common Salvationist with a tambourine, attended by a plethoric drummer and a shrivelled cornet-player blowing arrogantly out of tune with an equally strident choir. She would be a saint with a banner and a choir of maidens in white, trusting on their march of Christian charity in God and the honour of her countrymen, like the lady with the white wand in the poem. Geoffrey Lathkill had found it rather hard work courting a maiden of this type and with these views, though she was as beautiful and as pure as her fanciful ambition; a veritable saint in voice and manner, with soft, expressive eyes (that under excitement glowed with the warmth of enthusiasm), an oval face, a full round chin, and the fair hair of Saxony. Geoffrey had met her first during the shooting season on an estate adjoining his own. She visited his host and hostess, and had been the more responsive to Geoffrey's attentions than to those of any one of the men who had tried to win her either for herself or her wealth.

This naturally flattered a young man's vanity, and Geoffrey's hostess made a point of encouraging the evidently pleasant intercourse of the two young people. Geoffrey thought his heart was touched, but it was only his vanity. He liked to think that this beautiful and wealthy young woman preferred him above all others; and at church sitting by her side he was conscious that every eye was upon her, not simply on account of her pretty bonnet and oddly graceful and esthetic gown, but for the saint-like sweetness of her face, and the glowing wonder of her hazel eyes. The service, however, engrossed her, and Sunday was a sacred day; no boating, though the grounds of her lovely house and those of her neighbour swept down to the river in lawn and flower bed, and were furnished with boat-houses, landing stages, and various kinds of craft for the river; no tennis, no secular music, everything was severe and ascetic; and after awhile this Sabbath grew into Monday, and the severities of Sunday began to cast their shadows right across the week. It must be under-

stood that Geoffrey's introduction to Madeline ripened into friendship, which extended over a year or two, and he was one of her guests in the summer and a constant visitor when his friend, her neighbour, had cover-shooting parties in August, and kept also the feast of St. Partridge. There was a kind of belief in the neighbourhood that Geoffrey would one day induce Madeline to lay aside the kind of halo which people pretended to see about her fair hair, and settle down with him into pleasant, if serious, married life. While, however, they thought Geoffrey was getting nearer to this consummation, he was getting further from it, and the evolution of the halo was going on apace, until the brightness of it was too much for Geoffrey, with the ideal life to which Madeline aspired, outside what he called the pale of practical matrimony; and so they drifted apart. From alleged lovers they dropped back into mere friendship, and from friendship into the manners of mere acquaintances; though Mr. Thomas Marshall, the young lady's wise old agent and trustee, had given Geoffrey every encouragement to persevere in what Mr. Marshall called his suit for Madeline's hand, assuring him that it only needed a husband's authority to save her from a future of fanatical nonsense, and himself from the weary work of protecting her from the wiles of sharpers of every kind and class, from the begging-letter sneak to the sham philanthropist, and from the machinations of this worthy to the even more insidious clerical adventurer, who continually harped on the theme that it is not good for man to be alone, and so on.

But Geoffrey, whose heart had not flamed up at once, but had permitted it to be fanned by its own natural vanity, had found it cool in the absence of any self-supporting heat of its own; and so, as we have said, they drifted apart as easily and as inconsequentially as they had drifted into each other's society. Thus the dream of his friends on the Thames and the hopes of Mr. Thomas Marshall faded out. Meanwhile, Madeline engaged herself in all kinds of new ideas for converting the heathen, and evangelising the world, holding camp meetings in her park, or entertaining

religious societies, contributing to innumerable missions, home and foreign ; her ambition at last taking the definite form of the new Crusade which had long been in her mind ; a Crusade against sin, with a beneficent rear-guard of lay helpfulness ; a Crusade and an Ambulance, so to speak, of which she was the leader—something more it was said than a Peter in petticoats—an angel with a sacred banner, a vision of heavenly loveliness too fragile to last, except with the strength that God has often vouchsafed to His weakest creatures, for some Divine purpose.

Sitting down to his earthly dinner with a rare brand of champagne (for now and then the Castle had special demands upon its cellar), that had been spiritualised by an hour on the ice (the Castle had its own ice-house, stored from local waters in the winter—and they had pretty hard winters in the Peak),—Geoffrey found himself thinking of Madeline White, and he saw in imagination her saint-like face, eclipsed by the hearty, womanly, mirthful countenance of Adser Blythe. When the waiter had poured out the first glass of champagne as a libation to a brace of grouse, Geoffrey, on the man leaving the room, as requested, rose with a gallant air, that would not have been lost on a roomful of company, and pledged "The Beauty of the Peak," and then commended the wine, and enjoyed his dinner, and the pleasures of imagination.

CHAPTER XL

ON GUARD.

WITHIN a fortnight Geoffrey Lathkill was as well known at Castleton as if he had lived there for years. He had settled down in the house with the iron gates, the grass-plot, and the flower-garden ; and Mrs. Midwinter declared she had never had so charming a tenant. Her two maids

were almost as complimentary about Mr. Lathkill's valet and man-of-all-work, who had arrived at Castleton on the third day of Lathkill's visit with all kinds of luggage, easels, sketching-tents, and what-not.

Mrs. Midwinter's drawing-room had been turned into a studio. It faced north and south, and thus possessed the artist-light Mr. Lathkill desired. Two of the windows that faced upon the lawn were draped, but a glass doorway at the northern end was left open; and here the eye fell upon the greenest turf adorned with the brightest flowers, the whole shut in by a high wall, which in its turn was excluded from the sky by the hill that overlooked Cavedale. Mrs. Midwinter made every possible concession in regard to the re-arrangement of her house; for Lathkill was not only amiable, but a liberal paymaster. At first she was not sure whether it was quite the right thing for Adser Blythe to visit her tenant alone, even if only for the purpose of sitting to him for her portrait. The question had also been debated by Zodack Bradford, and had been protested against by Lewis Tregarron. Mrs. Blythe saw no objection; Adser could take care of herself; and Geoffrey had spent more during one day at her museum than any dozen visitors throughout a whole season.

Geoffrey would take his sherry and bitters one day at the Nag's Head, the next at the Wheat Sheaf; he had sat in the smoke-room of the Castle at night, and he had patronised the general trade of the place. He was never tired of visiting the lions of the locality, and had sat for the hour together sketching God's factory. The only man he did not get on well with was Tregarron, though he disliked a certain Staley Brentwood almost as much as Tregarron did. Sol Tidser amused him, and at the same time saddened him. There was something fateful, he thought, about the crooked chap, who turned up in odd, curious ways at unexpected times, and his chaunt of "After many roving years" seemed to imply a meaning that was certainly not intended. It was as if Sol knew Geoffrey's secret passion for Adser Blythe, and noted it as the *dénouement* of a world

of wandering and easy conquest to meet his match in this child of nature, this woman of the people. Sol had no such fancy; his song, as we know, was a reminiscence of his friend and patron, Jessop Blythe. Geoffrey's conscience troubled him a little, though it is only fair to say that he had no set design against Adser, nor any seriously formulated intentions one way or the other, but he permitted himself to become fond of the girl, while he honestly tried to make believe that he was fascinated with the historic and artistic attractions of Castleton.

Geoffrey and Adser had already had many a quiet talk. Sometimes he found her at leisure in the museum. Now and then he strolled into the cavern, but mostly when other people were there. Nevertheless he made opportunities for chat. Once he had met her near the Gate of the Winds, and she had walked with him thence over the top of Mam Tor, in the direction of Peveril's Castle. It was during this pleasant ramble that Geoffrey, in a bantering way, asked her if she had ever had a sweetheart "besides Mr. Tregarron," he said, with a smile.

"I wonder why you ask me such a foolish question," she said. "Do you suppose it is a compliment?"

"Well, no," said Geoffrey, taken a little aback.

"It's the kind of question lads out for the day ask lasses they meet at teetotal trips from Buxton and other places."

"Is it?" said Geoffrey, amused.

"Suppose I should ask you a question of that kind?" she said.

"Well, I should endeavour to answer you to the best of my ability," he replied.

Adser hated to have Mr. Lathkill speak to her as if he thought her one of the ordinary silly, frivolous lasses that she allowed were common enough in shops and bars and such like places. Spite of her lowly station and her unconventional manners, she was just as proud in her way as the finest lady in the land. Not only in words, but in her sudden silences, in protesting "Ohs," in her quick repartee, and by an occasional toss of her head, she gave Geoffrey

to understand that, if they were to be friends, he must treat her with respect and consideration; for the more she found herself liking him, the further indeed that she drifted into love with him, the more exacting she became in the matter of courtesy.

"Very well, then," she said, looking at him with an arch flash of her eloquent eyes, "have you ever had a sweetheart?"

"Yes, one," he said, with acted demureness.

"Only one?" she asked, raising a cross-examining forefinger.

"Only one in earnest," he replied.

"And where is she now?"

"I don't know."

"Did she jilt you?"

"No."

"Did you jilt her?"

"No."

"But she is not your sweetheart now?" Adser asked, with a little hurry of increased interest.

"No."

"Oh!" said Adser, with an unmistakable sigh of relief.

"She was a beautiful girl," said Geoffrey, in something of his former tone of banter.

"Of course," said Adser.

"A lovely figure."

"No doubt," said Adser.

"The loveliest hair."

"Had she really!" said Adser, with a little scoffing laugh.

"And she could sing divinely."

"I shouldn't wonder," said Adser. "And how came you to let her slip?"

"I don't know what she had to her fortune, but quite a large sum," said Geoffrey, not noticing Adser's last question.

"I wonder that didn't decide you," said Adser, sharply.

"Oh, then you think I would marry for money?"

"If you wouldn't, you're a grand exception from all I've heard of men making up to rich lasses and widows wi' brass."

"Brass?" said Geoffrey.

"Money; it's all th' same," said Adser; "we call it brass i' th' Peak."

"I'm sorry you have such a poor opinion of me," said Geoffrey, pretending to be hurt.

"Nay, I dare say you may be th' exception to money marriers; you're an exception in so many other ways; but what became of yonder lass, your only sweetheart wi' th' fine figure, th' lovely hair, and th' divine voice?"

"I'm afraid she joined the Salvation Army," Geoffrey replied, once more his natural self, with that little suggestion of banter, however, that troubled Adser, because it seemed like "making fun of her." He pleased her most when he was serious and talked what she called sense, and told her about some of the wonders he had seen beyond the seas.

"What wi' a tambourine and a great hulking fellow banging a drum under her aristocratic nose!" Adser exclaimed.

"I can't quite say whether it had drums and tambourines in it, but it was some kind of a Salvation Army; I know that I wouldn't take the shilling and become a recruit, so we couldn't agree about it, and——"

"Don't you think you should tell that story to th' marines, as our Zodaack Bradford would say?"

"To the marines?" repeated Geoffrey, smiling at the familiar phrase that sounded oddly on Adser's lips.

"Yes."

"And who are your marines in Castleton?"

"Nay, don't ask me; Zodaack will tell you. But you seem to be in one of your funny whims to-day."

"No, I don't think so; if it is not exactly true to the letter about that sweetheart of mine and the Salvation Army, at all events she had such strange ideas of evangelisation and giving up all one's life to the work of the Master and so on, that I found, if ever I should make up my mind to marry her, that I should be a very secondary person in the partnership, so it was off; not, mind you,

Miss Blythe, that I was really in love; no, and never have been that I know of, though it is rather suspicious this long stay I am making in Castleton, eh?"

Adser did not reply, but walked on by his side silently. Then he attempted to take her hand, which she resented with a flushed face, and hurried on as if she would leave him.

"Don't go, Miss Blythe; you promised to show me the way, you know."

"Yonder's Sol Tidser," she said, "he'll show you." And thereupon running towards Sol, who was sitting with a book in a grassy undulation of the mountain-walk, she called out "Sol Tidser, hi!"

Sol, taking no notice, she gave out her signal whistle that was something like a boatswain's call, and Sol looked up and was on his crooked legs in a moment.

"Sol, here's a job for you," she said; "Mr. Lathkill wants you to show him the way to th' Castle—not Castle hotel—Peveril's, and down t'other side beyond Cavedale and into th' highway."

"All right, I'm your man, sir," he said, running back to Lathkill; while Adser, without another word, fairly flew along the ridge and soon disappeared beyond the remains of the once gloomy fortress, where, suddenly reconnoitring the country far and near, now shading her eyes and now lying down as if to listen, she crept within the shadow of a bit of jutting crag, then sat still a little while; and finally, in a most mysterious way, slid out of sight altogether.

Old Mucklethorpe was not surprised, while going his rounds with a party of visitors from Liverpool, to meet Adser coming from the furthest end of the cave; it was a trick she had often played him; he never could guess how it was done; and on this occasion he was so pleased to see her, that he did not trouble to say that he had not seen her go into the cavern, and nobody except himself had had the key. She had deserted the post of volunteer guide so long, that he could only exclaim: "I am glad to see thee, lass. I do hope yo'll help me agin wi' visitors; I'm sore put to it wi'out yo."

Adser only laughed and said she would see about it; but just then she had other things to attend to; what other things did not transpire. Adser simply walked quietly home, went to Zodack's room and sat in an easy-chair that he called her throne, and watched him chasing with a fine-pointed needle a piece of shining mineral that was whirling round and round on his lathe like an impaled death's-head moth; and Adser felt as if her own heart was being similarly tortured.

CHAPTER XII.

ADSER BLYTHE SITS FOR HER PORTRAIT.

It was quite a week after this incident of the walk over Mam Tor before Geoffrey had induced Adser to sit for him in his extemporised studio at the Laurels. He had done everything in his power to regain her friendship, though he hardly knew how he had offended her. Once or twice he had made sketches of her at the entrance of the cavern when he had also been studying, or professing to study, the general effect of the scene. Once he had introduced Tregarron into a group of the ropers, and, hoping to conciliate the Welshman, had shown him the result, but Tregarron only scowled at it, and remarked that a photograph was good enough for a rope-maker.

Geoffrey was delighted when it was settled that Adser should sit for him. He had begun to feel that a day without a talk with the girl was a lonely business. By no means unsophisticated in the art and practice of flirtation, he nevertheless hardly knew how firmly this girl of the cavern had taken hold of his fancy, and how deep an impression she was making on his heart. The truth is, he did not think about it. She amused him. It was a new pleasure to talk to so fearless yet so timid a girl, and one who was so naturally and unaffectedly beautiful. She

seemed to lead him on, and when, as he thought, he was surely winning her confidence, she would suddenly fly out at him, or sulk, or run away just as she had done that day on the mountain. Adser was quite unconscious of leading him on, she had no subtle plan of making him love her; but she was impressing him in a way that kept her continually in his thoughts. He had quite looked forward to her visit to the Laurels. When she arrived, he plotted all kinds of questions for conversation. He liked to hear her talk. Even the blemish of her dialect did not affect him unpleasantly. He found a peculiar music in her voice. Her laugh was genuine and mirthful, and her teeth fairly shone when she was merry. Geoffrey had never seen a complexion so healthfully pale. It had nothing in common with the anæmic poverty of blood that accompanies the pallor of the Londoner. Her lips were red, her eyes bright; and now and then a flush stole into the fair cheeks that, to Geoffrey, seemed perfectly beautiful.

Adser was sitting by an open window partly shielded from the morning sun by an outer blind. She was dressed as Geoffrey had wished, in the brown serge and old-fashioned sun-bonnet in which the artist had first seen her. They had chatted about various things while Geoffrey was busy getting his easel and his palette ready. He was purposely dawdling, and Adser was in a good talking humour. Presently Geoffrey asked her who was the remarkable person they called Scarthin Blythe.

"Oh, he's a queer lot," she replied; "he's my uncle. Where have you seen him?"

"One day coming out of the cottage, and on another occasion going into the tumble-down, picturesque old place they call the Travellers' Rest; the swinging sign is still there; but I didn't notice much in the way of rest for travellers; even the sign was creaking in a very doleful way."

"Yes," said Adser, "it's generally a bit windy there; it's a queer kind of place, Scarthin's smithy."

"Oh, do they call it a smithy?"

"*Some folks do.* He's got a bit of a blacksmith's shop at

the back where he shoes his own horses. Oh, he's a hard lot, is Scarthin Blythe! I don't know that any of my family's much to boast of, but even Granny Blythe can't stand Scarthin, though they say he's as rich as a Jew. He's gotten his hand on many a poor farmer's homestead, I've heard say; but I don't know much about him, except that when he speaks to me I feel as if somebody was walking over my grave. Eh, but you should go through Winnatt's at night! they call it 'gate of winds,' you know, and there's been no end of murders down there. Last man as was killed there however's years and years ago. He was in a Glossop bank, and was running away with stolen money. His horse went over a nasty bit right into th' Winnatts, and he broke his neck. Old Scarthin married his widow a month or two after, and made a drudge of her, and she looks as much like a ghost as a real boggart, they say, though I've only seen her about twice. I've heard a deal about boggarts, but I never saw one; I don't believe in 'em; if there'd been such things, I should have come across one for certain in th' cavern. Eh, but I am chattering. I've never talked so much to anybody as I have to you, not even to Zodack Bradford."

"I like to hear you talk," said Geoffrey; "besides, you have so much to say that is interesting to a stranger."

"I dare say; I often think Castleton and hereabouts must seem very queer to visitors, especially if they stay long enough to get to know all about the place."

"It is a very romantic village," said Geoffrey, "and the people are what you call mostly 'characters.' Now there's Staley Brentwood—what is he?" said Geoffrey, as he squeezed a fresh tube of colour upon his palette.

"He lives retired," Adser replied.

"Lives retired?" repeated Geoffrey.

"He was in the Derby police, and married a widow with money."

"And why does Mr. Tregarron dislike him so much?"

"There are folk a man can't help hating, Zodack says; it's their nature."

"But was there not something about his being willing to risk his life for you?"

"Who told you that?"

"Mucklethorpe."

"He's a regular old woman for gossip, Mucklethorpe," said Adser, her eyes bent upon Geoffrey's palette, which was by this time radiant with colour.

"He seems a very amiable old fellow," said Geoffrey.

"Oh, he's all right!"

"But how was it that he was willing to sacrifice himself?"

"Oh, it was just nothing. The cavern was flooded, and they thought I was in Roger Rain's house and couldn't get out. Staley Brentwood volunteered to go after me, and he hadn't got as far as first dip in th' cavern when he was washed out like a drowned rat."

Adser laughed heartily at the memory of Staley's appearance on that memorable occasion. It was a musical laugh. Geoffrey thought he had never heard a laugh so genuine and so full of the enjoyment of life.

"And where was Tregarron?"

"Talking politics with Zodack Bradford."

"And you? Were you in the cavern?"

"That's telling," said Adser, with a little nod of the head implying mystery.

"And is it ever since Staley wanted to save your life that the Member for Wales has hated him?"

"They always snarled at each other," said Adser; "but didn't Zodack tell you that old Mrs. Brentwood was jealous of Staley because he went and half-drowned himself?"

Adser laughed again as she asked this, to her, most ridiculous question, pausing in the middle of her merriment to offer the comment of "Just fancy anybody thinking about Staley Brentwood; fifty, if he's a day, and with a nose in everybody's business. They say he was the most ferreting sergeant of police that was ever known in Derby, always finding something out which there was nothing at the bottom of. He spends most of his time wi' county police in *th' Peak*, and spies on folk for them."

"Now, then, I am quite ready," said Geoffrey, placing a chair upon the platform for Adser. "Will you oblige me by taking this seat?" He offered his hand to her, but she stepped upon the dais unassisted, and sat down as if this was by no means her first experience of portrait painting.

"Thank you," said Geoffrey; "have you ever sat for an artist before?"

"Do they call photographers artists?" she asked, with a little hesitation.

"The photographers call themselves artists," said Geoffrey.

"But you don't," said Adser, still a little embarrassed.

"Hardly," said Geoffrey.

"I once had a photograph taken for Zodack at Buxton; he liked it; I thought it was hateful."

Geoffrey moved towards her with a view to pose her, but observing a certain stand-offish manner in the way she looked at him, he merely stood below the platform and directed how she should sit. He found her apt in her interpretation of his meaning, and began to make a rough crayon sketch of her.

"We can talk while I work all the same," he said, noticing a somewhat fixed expression spreading over her otherwise mobile features.

"Very well," she said, putting on what Geoffrey called her submissive manner, which was one that came at intervals when she was puzzled or very much interested.

"I mentioned Tregarron just now," he said; "by the way, I don't think he likes me much."

"Oh, he's a character, you know," she said, recovering her natural manner; "it doesn't do to take too much notice of what he says. Some folk think too much before they speak. Some think too little. Tregarron doesn't think at all; he outs with whatever comes into his mind."

"He likes you very much?"

"Well, I've never done anything to make him go against me that I know of," said Adser; "we've been brought up together as you may say."

"But they tell me he doesn't aspire to be your brother?"

"How do you mean, aspire?"

"He has higher hopes."

"Oh, Tregarron has all manner of fads, wants to see life. Ho says he has thoughts of being a missionary, says he envies my father who run away to foreign lands, but there's soft heads in Castleton who make out that he should be a member of Parliament, like the Duke's son—such rubbish!"

"He's a clever chap, eh? Can make a good speech? Doesn't he write poetry?"

"Lewis Tregarron knows more than most; but when you come to 'Lord Ullin's Daughter', 'Mary, the Maid of the Inn', and verses of that kind, Tregarron's only a rope-maker, after all."

"A very good rope-maker, but not a very good poet, eh?"

"Have you heard him say the speech, 'Ruin seize thee, ruthless king'?"

"No; is it very stirring?"

"It isn't bad, and 'Men of Harlech,' well, that isn't up to much, but it wants singing he says. Have you heard him sing?"

"No; I have a great many pleasures to come, I find."

"Oh, I don't know about pleasures, but they say my father was the man to sing, and Zodack tells of his whistling like a blackbird."

"He's coming home, they say."

"Grandmother's heard that story any time this two or three years."

"Rich, they say?"

"I wonder he dare show his face in Castleton," Adser replied, with a slight droop of the corners of her mouth.

"Oh, but he is your father," said Geoffrey, pausing in his pretended work to look at her.

"Yes, that's it; and he left mother to die and me to be dragged up anyhow; a nice father, that! And if it hadn't been for dear old Zodack Bradford, Nannie Blythe would have brought me up with a stick. Zodack's had many a

row with her about that; but that's long since. She has to be content to give me the length of her tongue now, instead of her staff."

"You've had rather a hard life, my poor girl," said Geoffrey, in a tone of pity.

"Oh no, I haven't, I've had a very good life as things go. I'm not to be pitied. I don't know anybody that I envy, and nobody that I'd change places with."

Adser drew herself up proudly, and Geoffrey was quick to say:

"My dear Miss Blythe, I don't commiserate you. I admire you. I don't know when I have seen a young lady whom I admire so much."

"Oh, don't call me a young lady!" said Adser, the flush on her face dying away to paleness. "I'm no young lady. Young ladies don't get up at five in the morning and make fire and get breakfast ready, and sweep up, and be guides to caverns, and go tramping about lanes and hills and such like."

"There are girls who cannot help being ladies, though they are born to drudgery. Do you ever read fairy tales?"

"I've read 'Cinderella' and 'Dick Whittington' and 'Jack,' and Zodack has read some of 'Midsummer Night's Dream' to me; that beats them all, doesn't it?"

"Yes, I think it does," said Geoffrey, surprised at the answer.

"Bottom! Oh, isn't he great! If he'd been a bit mean he'd have been something like Staley Brentwood. And oh, you must get Zodack to chaff Tregarron about Parson Hugh and that other fairy tale; or do you call it a play? Yes, I know, a comedy. It's got Tregarron out of saying 'look you,' and 'indeed to goodness', Zodack says; it's where Llewellyn says he was born at Monmouth, and makes out it was where Alexander the pig was born. That sets Tregarron goin', and sometimes he's real mad with Zodack, but they come round after a bit, and then Zodack gets him to say 'Ruin seize thee, ruthless king,' 'Confusion on their banners wait,' and it's enough to make a cat laugh!"

"It must be," said Geoffrey, delighted with the girl's gossip. "Mr. Bradford is your idea of a fine man?"

"How do you mean a fine man?" she asked.

"A fine character, a man to make a friend of," said Geoffrey.

"Oh, he's a man in a thousand is Zodack!" she replied.

"It's a wonder he never married."

"It would have been a wonder if he had. Who'd he have been likely to marry? Besides, he's an old man."

"Not so very old; besides, he was young once."

"Yes," she replied, thoughtfully; "of course, though I cannot imagine Zodack ever being young; that is, gadding about, blackberrying, nutting, or wading in the streams for fish. He must always have had old ideas."

"Yet he is lively enough, and nimble, too."

"Lively! I should think he was. He's the life and soul of Castleton; and as for being nimble, he can get about with the best. You should hear him and grandmother have a bit of a squabble; doesn't he get the better of her! He told her one day she was like a mill-wheel that run all day long and ground nowt. I dare say you've noticed that about her; how she goes on, talk, talk, talk, and, after all, says nothing, unless it is some nasty thing that angers you; I mean none of it's any good. Now I know what you're thinking. I can see it in the way you're smiling; you think I've got a long tongue of my own; pot calling the kettle black."

"No, indeed," said Geoffrey; "I like to hear you talk, you are so frank, and your voice is sweet."

"Thank you," said Adser, with a mock bow of her handsome head. "You'll be asking me to sing next."

"You told me you could not sing, and I have asked you to whistle," said Geoffrey, smiling.

"I only whistle when I'm giving signals to Mucklethorpe or walking by myself down in the valley or up above Peveril Castle."

"I wish I might go on one of those rambles with you," said Geoffrey, as if he were speaking to himself.

"You'd set Castleton talking if you did," said Adser; "and I don't know that I haven't given them food enough for gossip as it is, in sitting for my portrait; they all know about it."

"Do you care?"

"Not I," said Adser; "I've flown in the face of Castleton many a time."

"Indeed; in what way?"

"Oh, in many ways: in the way I've dressed my hair, and walking out of church once in the middle of the sermon. Who's goin' to be talked to as if one was dirt by a curate on a pound a week?"

"I certainly would not," said Geoffrey.

Then there was a pause, during which Adser wondered why getting ready to begin painting took so long, and, if it always consumed so much time, why Mr. Lathkill did not get ready before she arrived.

"Won't you tell me something else?" Geoffrey asked, presently.

"I can't think of anything just now; you said you'd tell me something about that young lady that you think is the same that Mr. Jerry Bray was telling us about being in Sheffield when he was there, and they say is coming through Castleton with her banner and her singing women."

"Yes, I will tell you all about her with pleasure, but another time; I want you to sit quietly now, for a little while."

"Very well," said Adser.

"I don't mean to insinuate that you have not been sitting quietly all the time."

"Oh!" said Adser.

"We will go on with our chat soon."

"Very well," said Adser; "you are ready to begin?"

"Yes," said Geoffrey, stepping up to the platform. "Permit me; your head a little this way, please." And he laid his hand upon her shoulder, a familiarity, slight as it was, that she let him understand, by a glance of her expressive eyes, that she did not like.

"Pardon me," said Geoffrey, who understood the silent protest as well as if it had been expressed in the most emphatic words.

It passed through her mind that quite recently, when Tregarron had suddenly kissed her, she had felt something like the annoyance that Geoffrey had set up when she found his hand upon her shoulder, and yet there was no flutter of the heart in her anger with Tregarron, whose face she had promptly slapped. Somehow the touch and the look of Geoffrey Lathkill hurt her; to her curiously sensitive nature it was an affront; and for a whole half hour she did not speak, and Geoffrey's spirits fell.

"It's raining," were her first words after the long interval, during which Geoffrey had painted seriously and without ceasing; "and I must have been here for hours. I can't stop any longer now."

She rose abruptly, picked up a large sun-bonnet which she had taken off on entering the room, and made straight for the door.

"I have not offended you?" said Geoffrey, anxiously, and following her, palette in hand.

"No," she answered, "but I can't stay any longer."

"You'll get wet; let me give you an umbrella."

"No, thank you; I've no use for umbrellas," she said, and was gone without looking back.

Geoffrey went to the door and watched her disappear along the path towards the Lapidary's cottage. She ran through the summer storm, her short skirts flying behind her and showing her neat ankles, her flapping bonnet looking like a pair of Mercury's wings against her head.

Geoffrey sighed as he stood watching her; and when he turned to re-enter the house, from which the sign "To Let, Furnished," had been taken down on the second day of his arrival at Castleton, Mr. Lewis Tregarron, the Welshman, came up to him from the opposite direction.

"A word with you, Mr. Lathkill," said the young man, in a peremptory manner.

"*By all means*," said Geoffrey; "step this way."

CHAPTER XIII.

THREE ANGRY MEN.

"This must stop!" exclaimed Tregarron as he followed Geoffrey along the passage to the studio.

"What, the rain?" said Geoffrey; "I think it is stopping."

"You know what I mean," said Tregarron, raising his voice.

"You are excited," was Geoffrey's reply, as he stood aside for the Welshman to precede him.

"It is in a righteous cause," said Tregarron.

"No doubt," replied Geoffrey, with exasperating coolness. "Won't you take a seat?"

"I can say what I have to say standing," said Tregarron.

Geoffrey laid down the palette which he had carried with him when he had followed Adser to the door, and had watched her hurry away through the rain. Tregarron, who was dressed in his working-clothes, took off his grey balbriggan, which he swung defiantly in his right hand. He was a picturesque, foreign-looking young fellow compared with the English traveller. His black hair, sunken eyes, slight moustache, and downy beard on a somewhat pointed chin, giving him far more the appearance of an artist than Geoffrey made; though the Englishman wore a thin brown velvet jacket and a white silk neckerchief. Tregarron's dress was a loose whitey-brown kind of blouse, fastened at the throat with a bit of faded yellow ribbon. The blouse fell low down over a pair of canvas trousers, and there were bits of fluffy yarn clinging to his dress. His hands were brown and bony. The young men were a remarkable looking couple, and the accessories of the scene upon which they had their battle of words were eminently in keeping with the two actors in life's real play.

"The rain has stopped," said Geoffrey, as he drew one of the blinds, letting in a flood of light upon the rough sketch of Adser Blythe's portrait. Tregarron saw the picture, and the light which fell upon it went to his heart like the stab of a knife.

The Welshman not deigning to answer Geoffrey's remark about the rain, the English gentleman said, "Won't you be seated?"

"I tell you I can say what I have to say standing," Tregarron replied.

"Have a cigarette?" said Geoffrey, opening a silver case and offering it to Tregarron.

"I don't smoke cigarettes," Tregarron answered, with a great effort to appear calm.

"May I take your hat?" said Geoffrey, fixing his eyes upon the oscillating head-gear; "it bothers you."

"No, thank you," said Tregarron, snatching the cap back as if Geoffrey had laid hands upon it.

"I only desired to place you at your ease," said Geoffrey.

"That you can never do," was the Welshman's answer; upon which Geoffrey said, "I am sorry," and then, striking a match, he said, "Will you allow me?" and, without waiting for an answer, began to smoke.

"I am not here on a visit of courtesy," said Tregarron, a little cowed by the coolness of the Englishman, and conscious that he could not hope to rival him in the kind of diplomatic fence in which Geoffrey seemed to be proficient.

"Is that the reason why you will not sit? May I be seated, although you prefer to stand?"

"You may be damned, sir!" exclaimed Tregarron, no longer master of himself.

"So may you," said Geoffrey, apparently undisturbed by the other man's anger; "there's no saying what may happen to either of us, or to any one else, for that matter."

"I'll tell you what'll happen to you," said Tregarron, white to the lips, "By the God you profess to worship, I *will beat your brains out* if you don't let that girl go!"

Geoffrey rose to his feet and mentally measured his adversary as Tregarron stood before him, his right hand raised rather to register a vow than to commit an assault.

"What do you mean, you fool?" said Geoffrey, his voice a tone higher than that in which he had previously spoken, and his eye kindling with anger.

"I mean what I say," exclaimed the Welshman, his deep set eyes ablaze with passion, his lips quivering, his voice harsh and grating; "if you were forty Lathkills, with forty Dukes of Devonshire at your back, I'd crumple you up like a leaf, damn you!"

"I don't think so," said Geoffrey, bracing himself for contingencies, and with his eyes fixed upon Tregarron's quivering lips. From much practical experience, Geoffrey had learnt that, if you want to anticipate a man's action in a physical encounter, you have only to keep your attention fixed upon his mouth, which for this purpose is a far better index than the eye.

Tregarron stepped aside and began to pace the room, turning suddenly to say, "Let us understand each other."

"By all means," said Geoffrey, once more resuming his seat and relighting his cigarette.

"You claim to be a man of honour," said Tregarron, clutching his cap as if to steady himself.

"Don't you?" Geoffrey asked in reply.

"I *am* a man of honour," said Tregarron.

"It is a pity you don't combine good manners with your honour," said Geoffrey.

"Better honour without manners than manners without honour," said Tregarron.

"No doubt," replied Geoffrey.

"When I met you at Buxton, you were coming on here for a day; you have been here more than a fortnight, and you are thinking of remaining until the winter."

"You have got my plans down to a dot; has Perryman been talking to you?"

"I don't talk with your lackey," said Tregarron.

"Oh, Perryman isn't a lackey; he is really, in his way, quite an educated gentleman."

"Intriguing with Mrs. Midwinter's servants while you carry on with higher game."

"'Carry on' is a phrase I don't quite understand."

"You want something more explicit, eh? You shall have it. You are a damned villain!"

The next moment Geoffrey had Tregarron by the throat with his right hand, in the act of striking him, when Zodack Bradford seized his wrist with a grip of iron, and Tregarron stood free.

"I was afraid it 'ud come to this," said Zodack; "a nice couple to be leashed together, both pretending good-will to the same person."

"Your friend will explain," said Geoffrey, casting a contemptuous look at Tregarron, who simply said, "In another moment I should have explained sufficiently for one day," intending Geoffrey to understand that he was only successful in his attack for the moment, which was probably true, for the Englishman fell upon his rival without a movement of warning, and Zodack appeared before Tregarron had time to wriggle out of Geoffrey's grip to strike a blow.

"I can explain, Mr. Geoffrey Lathkill," said Zodack. "It is common talk i' the village that yo are paying undue attentions to Adser Blythe."

"But," began Geoffrey, "I——"

"Hear me out, sir," said Zodack, in his clean-cut words and incisive manner; "and it has not seemed quite wise in us who have her welfare at heart that we should have consented to let her visit yo; we, knowin' her character, have nothin' to fear as to her conduct; but a woman's honour is a dainty thing and easily tarnished."

"And you think," began Geoffrey, to be again interrupted.

"Pardon me, sir," said Zodack; "this paintin' business may be a sincere tribute to nature, or it may be a pretext for encompassing a girl's ruin."

"*Hear me*," said Geoffrey, once more attempting to an-

ticipate all that Zodack could say with a declaration of his respect and his esteem, and his honest, honourable admiration of Adser Blythe; but Zodack would not be put down.

"Not, as I said, that we are afraid of Adser," went on Zodack, "but, yo see, we don't know yo so well as Adser, and suspicion is the beginning of treason. Tregarron here loves Adser——"

"But does she love Tregarron?" asked Geoffrey, losing his patience and the usual control of his good sense.

"What has that to do wi' the question?" asked Zodack, at the same time following up his inquiry with an answer. "Nothing. What we've gotten to do is to protect the honour and good name of an innocent girl, whom in our way we all love; and first thing I have to demand of both yo men is that not a word shall be said of what has happened here this day. Do yo think she'd mind? Not a bit on it, secure in her own approbation, and not caring what Castleton might think on her; but that's not it. We trust our women in the Peak, but we don't forget that they are human. What's more to the purpose, our women themselves have keener eyes for what they consider to be wicked men than they have for the grandest virtues. And so my friend Tregarron came to ask yo to put a stop to this portrait-takin', at least indoors. Folks are beginning to talk, and if we don't mind we'll have feights going on all over th' village, wi' your name and Adser's i' the scrimmage; and that's the sort of thing to be avoided. Tregarron is a bit hot-headed, but he has an honest marryin' love for Adser. Now give me your promises, both, that no word passes about this trouble; and yo, Mr. Lathkill, let me tell Adser from yo, or tell her yourself, that she is not to come here again."

"Have you done?" asked Geoffrey.

"For th' present," said Zodack.

"Then let me ask a question. Is Mr. Tregarron engaged to Miss Blythe?"

"That's not your business," said Tregarron.

"But I think it is," said Zodack, "and I can answer it."

My friend Tregarron is not engaged ; my friend Tregarron has made no offer to Adser, but he loves her all the same, and would marry her to-morrow."

"And a very fortunate man he would be to marry such a girl."

"Yo think so," said Zodack ; "and now let me ask yo a question. Is there any possibility of your making a proposal to Adser Blythe?"

"Why, is this a match-making meeting?" said Geoffrey, his old manner once more in the ascendant.

"No, it's an anti-scandal meeting," said Zodack.

"Not the first time an evil has been invented for the purpose of getting up a society to put it down," said Geoffrey.

"Then yo think my visit a time-serving piece of humbug," said Zodack.

"No ; I think it is well-intentioned ; but don't you see what a thing you make of me,—a sneak, who comes among you with a pretence of honour and honesty merely to rob you and do you wrong, a wolf in sheep's clothing, a villain, as this person has had the temerity to call me?"

"And which I will repeat to your face when you please and where there is more room to make good my words. What else are you, that you stand there and prevaricate while a girl's honour is in question ; prevaricate in presence of her guardian, her more than father ; prevaricate to the man who has been brought up with her, who has watched over her from her cradle, and who would lay down his life for her cheerfully——"

Zodack tried to stop the Welshman's harangue ; Tregarron would not be stopped.

"Who but a villain would hesitate for a moment what course he should pursue, appealed to by those who love her, appealed to by those who have right on their side, right and knowledge and love and self-sacrifice, and the honour of her name and the credit of the village in which they live ? But let me tell you, Geoffrey Lathkill, that you've got to decide, and decide outside your passion, outside your feelings, *outside your lawless emotions*, or I'll kill you, if I swing for it."

And by this time Tregarron was once more face to face with Lathkill, trembling, with vengeance in his heart and murder in his eyes.

"Pardon me," said Zodack, standing between the two men, and more particularly addressing Geoffrey; "he does not know what he says."

"He must be taught," said Geoffrey, his anger once more getting the better of him. "Leave this house, or I will fling you out."

"I will not leave it, and you will not fling me out," said Tregarron.

"Be patient, for Adser's sake," said Zodack, laying his hand upon Geoffrey's arm.

"For her sake, yes," said the Englishman.

"I appeal to yo, Tregarron—also for her sake—go away, leave me and Mr. Lathkill to settle this business for her sake."

Tregarron dragged his balbriggan upon his head and left the room.

"Now see here, Mr. Lathkill, let us talk this thing out quietly," said Zodack, taking off his soft round hat, and unbuttoning an old-fashioned brown frock-coat that he usually wore on Sundays. Mrs. Blythe had wondered what could have come to pass for Mr. Bradford to dress himself up on a week-day afternoon, and sally forth with his umbrella, that he only used on Sundays, and which everybody knew by its white ivory handle that Zodack had carved himself from a piece of elephant's tusk, that had been in his family for generations. The handle was an eagle with two diamonds for eyes.

"No man has ever called me a villain, and many a man has lost his life in countries thought to be civilized for a smaller matter,—not at my hands, since I see the question in your face, but with such provocation as I have received to-day; in any other place I would not have answered for the consequences."

"Nor I, for what might have happened here had not a whisper of instinct brought me in time to save yo both."

Well, now, just listen to me. Adser is not happy. Two days ago she came home and never uttered a word for hours; to-day she dashed into my room all wet and with tears in her eyes. Putting this and that together, I said to myself, Mr. Lathkill has offended her. Then I saw Tregarron making his way to the Laurels outside dinner hour; so I thought it time for me to make this call upon you; and I want to know what has happened."

"Sit down, Mr. Bradford," said Geoffrey.

Zodack took the chair that was offered to him.

"Will you smoke?"

"No, I thank you."

"Can I offer you any refreshment?"

"No, I thank you."

Zodack could see that Geoffrey was gaining time to reflect upon the answer he should make to his question.

"Adser's is a sensitive nature, I grant; but she doesn't cry for nowt," said Zodack, getting up to put down his umbrella in a corner of the room and his soft hat upon a chair close by.

"Poor child," said Geoffrey.

"Child no longer, I am sorry to say. Time doesn't stand still; sometimes I wish it did; when I think of Adser, I wish it did."

"Why more particularly in regard to Adser?" asked Geoffrey.

"Time is carrying her out of my guardianship," said Zodack.

"Maybe for the protection of a stronger arm," said Geoffrey.

"Whose is to be the stronger arm?" asked Zodack, looking straight at Geoffrey with his bright grey eyes.

"Ah, who knows!" said Geoffrey.

"I am not like to die for a good many years," said Zodack; "mine is a long lived family, and if Adser should need the protecting arm of a father, I am not one that brags, and shouts 'Come on,' like Tregarron, the Welshman——"

"And I can answer for the strength of your grip," said Geoffrey with a kind of smile that only made Zodack glue his lips the tighter together.

"You are making this young lass fond of yo," said Zodack; "what is your object?"

"Vanity, I suppose," said Geoffrey; "she seemed so heart-whole and free, so fine in her natural haughty way that any man might be forgiven for desiring to win her interest, her approbation; I expect that is my selfish attitude towards your ward. But I don't think that cub Tregarron is the man to make her happy."

"Yo speak a moral verdict against yo'rself; and yo've justified the Welshman's jealousy."

"Why, would you fling her into the arms of a half-bred oracular spouting fellow like that!" exclaimed Geoffrey, thrusting his hands into his pockets and pacing the room.

"I thrust her upon no man," said Zodack, calmly; "and no man must thrust hissen upon her either out of vanity or anyway else, unduly, unfairly,—yo know what I mean?"

"I know exactly what you mean," said Geoffrey; "I will leave Castleton to-night; give me your hand."

Zodack rose and put out his strong bony hand, saying, at the same time, "Mr. Lathkill, you are a gentleman; good-bye, sir!"

"Good-bye," said Geoffrey, shaking his hand.

Zodack picked up his umbrella, put on his hat and went his way.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE PATIENCE OF LOVE.

TREGARRON started to go back to his work. He walked leisurely. His Tam O'Shanter head-gear was pulled over his eyes. His hands were thrust in the pockets of his grey blouse, that was something between a navvy's slop and a

countryman's smock-frock. The garment gave distinction to Tregarron's appearance, though it seemed to bring down others to a lower level. The ropers did not favour it much. It suggested to them the peasant. There was more independence in the old coat and trousers. The women mostly wore the kind of print dress and hood contrived out of a small shawl which are common in the factory districts. At the same time there was more individuality in the general attire of the ropers and village folk of Castleton than you will find in the manufacturing districts. Tregarron, indeed, might have been an artist thinking over some difficult point in an etching, puzzling his brain concerning the tone of a new picture, or mentally wrestling with a bit of delicate work of sculpture; but he was only communing with himself touching the scene just enacted at the Laurels. Now that he was cooler than when he stormed at Lathkill, he began to think that perhaps he had done Adser an injustice in even hinting that there could be any real danger to her honour in visiting the Laurels. He wished he had made his grounds of opposition rest solely upon the question of scandal. Then his thoughts wandered away into an indefinite view of the future. He turned for a moment before entering Cavedale and looked across the broad landscape. A voice seemed to whisper to him as it had whispered many a time before, "Why not leave this land in which after all he was an alien?" The voice was answered somehow by the music of the brook that ran by his side and the familiar sounds of the valley, the birds, the distant lowing of cattle; and the tears came into his eyes. Tregarron had some of the qualities of the hero; but he was more of a poet than a pioneer, more of a dreamer than a doer. With the help of a loving, fearless woman there is no knowing what he might have achieved, or if his chin had been squarer and his head a trifle larger.

The dinner hour was over. Cavedale was quiet. One or two tourists with guide-books in their hands passed him as he strolled along. The sun was sinking gloriously. *Derbyshire wants sunshine* to soften and warm its gloomy

hills. Its valleys are green and pleasant. Ten thousand crystals seemed to dance on the face of the Styx. Strange to call so lovely a stream the Styx; yet it rose and disappeared very much like its classic prototype.

"Makin' a hextra dinner 'our," said Staley Brentwood; "yo're right to idle if yo can afford it."

Tregarron knew the voice, but made no reply. Brentwood had a rasping voice that broke now and then. He was like his voice. His complexion was the freckly fair complexion of a red-haired man. He cut his hair short and wore no beard or whiskers. Whether he shaved or not nobody knew. Sol Tidser in his half-witted way said that nothing was ever likely to grow on such a mug except moles and freckles. Tight, hard lips and goggle eyes and a cunning chin, with small ears that stood out from the head, making up in tokens of energy what their diminutiveness lost in character. He spoke a dialect of his own, the reminiscences of his city life in the Manchester police and a long acquaintance with a cockney sergeant in the same force. He hated Tregarron, and had always said behind his back that he would come to no good.

"All work and no play as they says," went on Brentwood, "makes Master Tregarron a dull boy."

Tregarron turned round and waited for Brentwood to pass him.

"'Ope I ain't disturbed your reflections," said Staley.

"I'll disturb yours, Mr. Staley Brentwood," said Tregarron, "if you don't go on about your business and leave me to mine."

"Dear me, what a bad temper we're in! But I don't wonder."

"You don't, eh?" said Tregarron.

"They say Adser Blythe's goin' to be married."

"Which way are you going?" asked Tregarron, suppressing his rage.

"I was goin' to the Lapidary's cottage," said Brentwood.

"Then go!" said Tregarron.

"I shall go when I please," said Brentwood, edging out of Tregarron's reach.

"Very well, then my way is in the opposite direction from yours," said Tregarron, about to return towards Castleton.

"You'll meet Mr. Lathkill, if you go back," said Staley.

"Supposing I do?"

"I think he's coming this way."

"What is that to you or to me?"

"Don't signify to me; but I should 'ave thought you'd feel jealous."

"Curse you, out of my road," exclaimed Tregarron, taking Brentwood by the collar and swinging him round until Staley's teeth chattered; "now get out, or I'll break your back!"

Staley on being released looked as if he would rush for Tregarron, but on second thoughts he rushed for home, and then proceeded to the local magistrate to summons Tregarron for assault. The only justice in Castleton was a pacific old gentleman, and he advised Brentwood to say no more about it. He reminded him that he was rather notorious for having his finger in other people's pies. "Paul Pry in the play was a fool to you," he said, "and he was comedy, you are tragedy; yes, you are Staley, you know you are, a regular detective unattached, a thief-taker, a lover of scandal and trouble; it is a pity you did not stick to your police duties in Manchester; you would have been much happier than you are here; oh, yes, I don't deny that you have rendered the county police some service; but be advised by me and let that fiery young Welshman alone."

"Hello, master!" shouted Sol Tidser, who had been watching the encounter between Staley Brentwood and Tregarron from his favourite corner on the rock facing the bend in Cavedale, "yo let him have it! Why didn't yo choke him? I'd like to have my fingers where yo got him; I'd squeezed life out o' the devil's skin!"

"No, no, Sol," said Tregarron; "not worth while; how *are you, Sol?*"

"Stunnin'," said Sol, with a grin; "been showin' a visitor over t' castle; he give me a shillin'."

"What are you reading?"

"The Bandits of the Blue Mountain, two pence coloured; they'd a' made short work of owd Staley Want-Rope-Never-Sweat."

"So I suppose," said Tregarron; "good-day, Sol; don't read too many of those penny dreadfuls."

"Can't read too many; they don't print enough. I never buys penny 'uns. I likes 'em coloured; let yo and me start a gang; yo'll be the captain, I'll be lewtenant, eh?"

"All right," said Tregarron, "we'll talk about it; good-bye for the present."

"Good-bye, there's another tough 'un waitin' for yo."

Tregarron saw the object of Sol's animadversion. Mrs. Blythe was standing by the stall at her door. She had tried to get into Zodack's room and break in upon his conference with Adser, but Zodack would not open to her. She was therefore not in the best of humours.

"Day to yo," she said, as Tregarron came up.

"The same to you," said Tregarron.

"Dinner hour's been over this hayf'-our an' more."

"Has it?" said Tregarron.

"Some folks 'as rare times," she added.

"Yes, I dare say."

"Did yo see our Adser Blythe come awhile ago runnin' through th' rain?"

"Are you looking for her?"

"No; she's wi' Zodack Bradford; they're havin' a confab about summat or other, I dunno what."

"I dare say they'll tell yo all about it soon."

"Not they; owd Zodack's as deep as Speedwell hole, and she teks after her muther, does Adser, and her muther wor deceitfullest lot as ivver drew breath."

"She didn't draw breath long I understand, poor thing," said Tregarron, studiously on his guard against being led into the kind of gossip "Stingy Blythe" was hoping to develop.

"Quite long enough to do a world of mischief; but happen yo hannat heard as my son's coming home?"

"Oh, yes, I've heard that often."

"But it's true this time, and he's gotten money, and we'n be rich."

"Yes, I have also been told that before."

"Aye, but even Zodack says it's true this time; I wonder what he'll say to our Adser goin' about and sittin' i' a man's room to hev her portrait took."

"Why, what should he say?"

"It wouldna matter if he wasna a gentleman, friend of Duke, and all that; might a ben one o' them photographin' chaps and no harm done, donat tell me yo like it."

"I would rather not discuss the subject," said Tregarron. "I'll go to my work, I think."

"Yo mun get to yo'r work or not, but I know it's troublin' yo. Do yo think I doant know as yo'n been there and had it out wi' him!"

"I was not thinking whether you knew or not. I know this, you are no friend to Adser; I know this, there is not a man or woman in the place that has not kinder feelings towards her than you," he said, losing his self-control and becoming oracular. "I wonder you're not ashamed of yourself to try and induce folk to speak against her; if you were a true woman and the honest guardian of your son's child, you would protect and shield her, not be her bitterest enemy."

"Hity-tity, why, what's up wi' thee? Me her enemy; I'm best triend she's gotten; I'm her grandmother!"

"You're her worst enemy, and beyond that you are a meddlesome, ill-conditioned, cantankerous old curmudgeon, that's what you are; and I'm glad at last to have the opportunity of telling you so."

"Oh, yo impudent, lying, ungrateful scamp! What am I? I never was called such names i' my life, and by a pauper! Yes, a pauper, waif, and stray that I've fed and clothed!"

"*You lie, Mrs. Blythe,*" said Tregarron. "God forgive

me for having to use such language to a woman; but you are not a woman; you are a monstrosity, a witch, a thing that honest men and decent women shudder at. A hundred years ago you'd have been drowned or burnt for an instrument of the devil. They'd have put you in the Styx, and you'd have gone to your rightful home in the bottomless pit."

Tregarron was white with rage.

"I wish I could get at thee wi' my stick, I'd mek thee smart," screamed "Stingy Blythe," her wrinkled face working like a mask under the influence of a series of electric shocks.

"What a fool I am," said Tregarron, stepping out towards the ropery.

"I'll hev th' law on thee, thou good-for-nowt!" shouted Mrs. Blythe in her highest screech.

"Ho, ho, ho, hoo, hoo, hoo!" responded Sol Tidser from his perch in the rocks.

"A what?" she asked herself, shaking her stick in the direction of Tregarron, who was now disappearing from her view. "A crumuggan, a katernmarran, a witch? It's blasphemy; I nivver 'eard nowt like it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" screamed Tidser, but she had no ears just then but the ears of Memory. "They'd a burnt me? I'm a witch, thou good for nowt niminypiminy foreign jack puddin'; Taffy was a Welshman, Taffy was a thief; I'll let thee know; I'll hev the law on yo!"

"After many rovin' years how sweet it is to come!" yelled Sol; "go it, owd 'Stingy Blythe,' go it, owd crutchy; get thy beesom and let's hev a ride; I'll show thee a cop we can leet on. I'd like to shove thee oover it."

Mrs. Blythe could only hear Sol's remarks in indistinct muttering and shouts, but she suddenly turned towards him and shook her crutch, "Ah, yo limb o' Satan, let me get within reach o' thee, that's all!"

Sol made an ugly gesture and screamed his defiance, and then, observing a brace of tourists sauntering up the Vale, remarked to himself, "Customers, Sol; the Dale's

lively to-day; they mun pay toll to Tidser. Eh, but if me and Adser Blythe was to go i' partnership as guides wot a heap o' money we'd mek!"

He disappeared, and Mrs. Blythe, observing the strangers, straightened her apron and put her cap to rights and repressed her anger. The sun shone out upon her trinkets, her Blue John brooches, her white spa cups, her jasper chalices, and her rows of beads, and she wayled the visitors with her best smile and curtesy, while Tregarron slipped into his place in the ropery. Old Woodruffe, sitting by his wheel, looked up and smiled inquiringly. One or two of the women nodded, as much as to say "It's not often you're late; what's up?" Tregarron, answering their silent inquiries, said, "I'll have to make up my time when you're having tea," and then picking up his bundle of yarn motioned to his oldest assistant to set his crank going, and began to spin his rope, backing along the walk and then coming forward and pacing the long nave of the natural cathedral, the great drums slowly turning to the music of the growing cordage.

"I've only stayed here for her sake," Tregarron was saying to himself as he walked to and fro spinning the twine that trembled as its fibres were knit by the old man at the wheel, "nothing else would have kept me. I might have known they would fling my pauper origin in my face. I doubt not that's how they all talk of me, with occasional references to the infamous distich, 'Taffy was a Welshman,' and so on. I've wasted my life. Jessop Blythe should have taken me with him; he was the bravest of the humdrum crowd. A pauper! And yet Fate tells me I've good blood in my veins. My God, if I had only had the courage to go forth into the world like that drunken Jessop, her father, and won my way to the front and come back here to lay all my wealth at her feet. It cannot be that Fortune has been waiting with a mission for me, or I should have taken up my harp or my sword and crossed yonder hills that always seem to shut me in; and when I *knew they'd make me a master in his place*, look you, I

waited and waited, hoping that she would be my reward. Great heavens, how I love her! What else is there for me but her? What else is worth having? All I have done has been for her; all I have learnt, my bit of Latin and French, my efforts to put into verse such thoughts as have been inspired by her love and by these wild hills and by the instinct of music and of appreciation of others' songs. But I must give her up or she must take me for what I am, her slave; I can endure no more; I've paid for her. Yes, I have; I've paid a life that might have been great to bring it down to something between Sol Tidser and Zodack Bradford, and I could have been content to go on walking by her side, living in her smile, bearing her jests, so that I got a kind word now and then, happy to look up from my work and see her passing into the cave at the head of a gaping crew of idiots from Manchester and Sheffield, proud to note their admiration of her, proud to observe her lofty contempt of them, and happy beyond words when she'd wave her hand to me as she passed to and fro. A milksop! That's what I am. Only a milksop would be so easily content. To be repulsed even if I kissed her hand, to resent even a companion's kiss at Christmas time under their symbol, which is more Welsh than English; to laugh if ever I talked of love. I should have taken her with the strong hand of mastership; the bold wooer is to the woman's taste. Yonder aristocrat from London, he knows how to woo; no check of love and respect stays him; he's of the bandit order of lover; the habit of conquest has given him courage. But, by God, he shall not have her! I'll kill him first!"

"Why, Master Tregarron, what be up wi thee?" shouted the old man at the wheel. "Thou'rt ravellin' wi' Woodruffe's rope; thou's gotten out of thy walk."

"I think I've gotten a bit out of my mind, neighbour," said Tregarron, stopping to correct his error.

"I'd no idea as the Welshman had taken to drink," murmured the old man to himself; "been drinkin' s dinner hour, mek no doubt, at Wheat Sheaf or at Duke's Head. I wouldn't a minded a drop mysen?"

CHAPTER XV.

ADSER'S HARBOUR OF REFUGE.

"WHERE have you been?" asked Adser, who was sitting in Zodack's room awaiting his return.

She loved Zodack's room. It had been her haven of rest and recreation ever since she could remember. Never until now had she felt, while swinging her legs in his old arm-chair, anything like an abiding anxiety. Her troubles had been many, but Zodack's room had always proved a happy harbour of refuge. When "Stingy Blythe" had followed her into its precincts with her sharp tongue and threatening crutch, Zodack had always reminded the scold that this was his own private bit of the world in which he permitted no other authority besides his own; and Jessop's cantankerous mother knew better than to brave the proud old Zodack, so gentle, as a rule, so stern and inflexible when occasion demanded.

It was a tall old chair, with a wide long back and a soft fluffy seat. If you wanted to plant your feet fairly on the floor while sitting in it you had to keep on the edge as the comic man sits on a drawing-room lounge in farces. But Adser liked to fling herself back in the seat and swing her legs, and Zodack knew every variety of swing in them, the swing of defiance, the swing of anger, the swing of disappointment, the swing of joy. He looked at the strong but shapely ankles and the neat, well-shod feet as he entered the room, and noted the nervous oscillation of both, and only remarked,—

"Ah, my love, you're here,—that's right!"

It was a curious room, workshop, sitting-room, and bedroom, all in one,—Zodack's little world, his Asia, Africa, and America, his museum, his library, his tower of observation. The least intelligent person being introduced *therein* could not help but feel that he was in the dwell-

ing-place of an interesting man. There was an atmosphere of restfulness in it, and a dumb intimation that it was the home of a man who respected himself, and would claim respect from others. Rooms tell their stories, even in the absence of occupants. It was a large square apartment. The first thing you saw was the fireplace. Being summer, there was no fire. In its place was a large bowl of heather and Marguerite daises. Over the high mantel there were several old portraits in silhouette framed in black and gold, and an engraving of the Stratford bust of Shakespeare. On the mantel itself half a dozen quaint vases of old Staffordshire and Royal Derby were mixed up with various ornamental specimens of local spa and other minerals. The fireplace was flanked on either side by an old oak settle, and a round table with many legs, upon which stood a jar of roses amidst a number of books, a microscope, and a cabinet of geological specimens, some of them sparkling with ores, others, bright with crystals. On the right hand of the fireplace, taking up one side of the room, a camp bedstead and large old cabinet were screened off by a blue and white curtain hung on an iron bar with many rings. At the other end of the room were a well-filled bookcase, a corner full of alpen staves, fishing-rods, a gun, and here and there, in other corners and on temporary shelves, half finished chalices, and vases in the Blue John spa, and cases of ornamental productions in other material, in various conditions of progress, some like sketches in clay, others giving token of experimental engraving. He was an ingenious old fellow, this Zodack Bradford. He had a natural gift of design. Along the whole length of the room, opposite the fireplace, was a low square-paned window, only interrupted by a door in one corner. Level with the window were two lathes with small water-troughs, and intervening tables of tools and minerals. The window looked out upon a small garden and a stretch of green fields that mounted into treeless hills with breaks of stone and shale, and above them shone a clear, blue sky.

Zodack took great delight in his work. The dripping fountain just above his favourite lathe that cooled his graver and gave surface to the stone he was shaping, often helped to soothe his mind when it was troubled about Adser. The whirr of the wheel was familiar music to his ear. The flash of colour that responded to the sunlight gave satisfaction to his esthetic fancy. On quiet days, when he was alone, he would sit at his lathe and vary his manipulation of the flying object on his wheel with glances into the garden below, and up the verdant sides of the hills beyond. He was a great lover of nature,—knew where every bird in the district built, was acquainted with every wild flower, had a geological knowledge that had surprised the government surveyors, and some railway engineers, who had been making observations in the Peak for years. But, above all things, he loved Adser Blythe as a fond father might love his only child. He found her so apt and yet so innocent, so full of natural intelligence, so gentle and yet so strong, so independent and yet to him so lovable; and withal, she was fair and fresh to look upon, with a frank open face, fearless eyes, and in her gait and manner, the swing of health and freedom, no pinch of binding corsets, no tight boots, no restraint of any kind; and yet the girl had a notion of finery, loved a bit of colour, invariably had her frocks cut in the best fashion; but she could never bear to have her limbs hampered any more than she could endure a check upon such of her thoughts and opinions as concerned her views of personal conduct. She was everything that Zodack could wish her to be, and it was with ill-concealed anxiety that he had watched her growing interest in Geoffrey Lathkill; not that he desired her to entertain the proposals of Tregarron, but it had occurred to him that there was a possible danger in Lathkill's attentions that did not apply to the devotion of Lewis Tregarron, the Welshman.

It is a pity that so harmonious and sweet a picture as Adser and Zodack's room made together should have had any *jarring note of tone or colour*, anything to do with worldly

troubles—anything even of a reminiscent nature that did not accord with the artistic yet unsophisticated atmosphere. One could imagine the place utterly incomplete without Adser sitting in the high-backed chair, with glints of sunshine upon her dull-red hair, and the perfume of the heather-clad hills coming in at a little lattice window above one of Zodack's lathes. Her sun-bonnet had slipped from her head and was hanging on the back of the chair. Her hair, that had been roughly bound in a knot at the back of her neck, had come down and was hanging about her face, which was paler than usual. Her dark eye-lashes drooped over her half-closed eyes, and her dress was unbuttoned at the throat showing the whiteness of her flesh and the beautiful contour of her neck; and withal there was an unconsciousness in her easy and graceful pose that was in artistic sympathy with the paintable disorder of the room, orderly in its disorder, quaint in its unaffected utility of arrangement and decoration.

"Where have you been?" Adser repeated.

"Excuse me," said Zodack, going behind his curtain to take off his Sunday coat and put away his Sunday umbrella. "Yo should know where I've been," he said, speaking while he was changing his costume.

"How should I know?"

"Yo wouldn't be at me like that the minute I come in if yo didna, Adser, my love."

"Oh," said Adser, dropping one foot lower than the other, to reach the lower bar of the chair.

"Your grandmother's on the stairs."

"Is she? What for?"

"Wants to come in!"

"Oh!" said Adser.

"I wouldn't let her!"

"She's been nagging me like a tramp o' Saturdays."

"Has she? What about?"

"Oh, I don't know!"

"I've been to see Mr. Geoffrey Lathkill," said Zodack, reappearing from beneath his curtain and in his work a day

attire, an old grey jacket, and a black silk handkerchief tied round his neck, something like an old-fashioned stock.

"What for?" asked Adser, swinging her feet in a nervous, if defiant, way. Her tanned boots were still wet with the grey mud of the dale, and her sun-bonnet was soft and crumpled.

"Well, I went to talk to him about yo," said Zodack.

"About me!" exclaimed the girl, as if she were surprised, though the old man knew she was only feigning.

"Why, who should I go to talk to him about?"

"How do I know?" said Adser.

"Do yo think I didna see yo come hoame, wet and troubled?" asked Zodack; "what other man or woman is there, and who i' Castleton could trouble yo except this Lathkill? Why, yo wouldna gie anybody else a moment's thought."

Adser's eyes fell as Zodack Bradford looked into her face, and her feet sought the lower bar of the chair, upon which she rested them.

"I say, who else could send yo running hoame wi' tears i' your eyes?" asked Zodack, turning from her and sitting down to his lathe.

"I didna think you saw me," she said.

"They say God sees everything," said Zodack, turning his bright, searching eyes once more in her direction. "I doant know how that may be. I have my doubts, but I see thee, Adser, lass, a' the time, if not i' reality, i' the spirit; yo're niver out o' my sight."

"Do you watch me?" asked the girl, flushing a little.

"My soul watches thee, Adser; my heart watches thee. Yo cannot understand, of course, what a living interest an owd bachelor must feel in a lass that he's seen grow up from a baby, and he her second fayther, as it were, her guardian; and such a lass, Adser; such a dear, good-hearted, fine, honest lass as thou art!"

The old man's voice faltered a little. He began to work the treadle of his lathe and watch the flying bit of purple stone that he was cutting for a pendant. It was an unusual *bit of stone*, with flashes of colour in it that were opaline,

and it looked like a butterfly as it whirled upon his wheel.

Adser's heart was beating almost as fast as the treadle, for she loved Zodaek Bradford as if he had been a father who had devoted his life to her. As for her real father, she owed him nothing, not even gratitude, unless her fine physical nature was a debt to him; but this would be straining the claims of heredity into a sentiment.

"I tow'd Mr. Geoffrey Lathkill that it wasna right that me and your grandmother should consent to your going there about that portrait so much, and I tow'd him that Lewis Tregarron had a voice i' the matter."

"You did!" she exclaimed; "and why? What's Lewis Tregarron got to do wi' it?"

Adser's blue eyes flashed as she asked the question, and she half rose from her chair.

"Why, he has been your friend and companion since yo were a little thing, and he loves yo!"

"Loves me!" she exclaimed. "Who tow'd you so?"

"Nobody, but ivverybody knows it. Do yo?"

"He's said some fond rubbish to me when he's been writin' his poetry, and once, like a fool, he tried to kiss me, and I hit him i' the face," said Adser, stepping down to the floor.

"But yo didna hit Mr. Geoffrey Lathkill," said Zodaek, bending over his flying butterfly, and touching it deftly with his needle or graver.

"How dare you, Zodaek Bradford!" she exclaimed, in a tone and manner that were entirely new to Zodaek. It was not passion nor anger; it was indignation, the expression of a feeling which hitherto she would have let off in ordinary words of anger or in some half-humorous retort.

Zodaek looked up. His feet paused on the treadle. The butterfly slackened its gyrations.

"Answer me!" she went on, her face burning. "How dare you say that Mr. Lathkill kissed me?"

"I didna, my lass; I didna," said Zodaek.

"You did!"

"Nay, lass!" said Zodack.

"You said I didna hit Mr. Lathkill, and——"

"My dear love," said Zodack, coming down from his stool and interrupting her speech, "my dear love, doant, doant——"

She had burst into tears. Zodack put his arm round her waist and drew her towards him and sat upon the settle, pulling her down by his side.

"You think bad of me," she said between her sobs, "and you think bad of Mr. Lathkill."

"Nay, lass," said Zodack, his voice trembling; "I know yo too well to think bad of yo,—might as well say I think bad o' the sunshine, and quarrel wi' the brook as keeps us i' music a' the day. Nay, lass, nay!"

"He didna mean to offend me," she said.

"I'm sure he wouldna. What did he say to thee, lass?"

"It wasna what he said. He laid his hand on my shoulder to make me stand in another way for the picture, and I didna like it!"

"And so yo put your bonnet on and come hoame," said Zodack, who was not so much of a bachelor nor so little of a student of human nature that he did not know what the girl meant.

"Yes," said the girl; "and now tell me what you said to him."

"I will, lass, sin' yo've tow'd me all that's happ'd."

"I have," said the girl, drying her eyes and sitting once more comfortably and unrestrained by the old man's side.

"I tow'd Mr. Lathkill that meand your grandmother——"

"Never mind her," said Adser, interrupting him.

"But we've gotten to mind her," he answered; "she's your grandmother."

"On my father's side, and I don't value that, on th' contrary, I——"

"But, my dear lass——"

"It's no use talking, Zodack," said the girl, "she's nivver a good word to say for my mother, and only yesterday she tow'd me what she has tow'd me a thousand times, but

yesterday more bitter, that my mother was t' ruin of her son, that she wasna good enough to be his wife, and that she had only been sorry once, and that was ivver sin' I were born, that I favoured my mother i' my looks, and not my father."

"There she's wrong, my lass," said Zodack, drawing her head upon his shoulder and stroking her hair; "thou'rt like thy father, lass, though yo've gotten your mother's eyes and hair."

"Then I wish I wasna one bit like him! A nice father, to leave my mother to die and me to starve, for all he cared! Nay, donnat shake your head; you know you've tow'd me so yourself. And Tregarron knows it, and Nannie Blythe is a hard, cruel old lot, and you know that!"

Adser drew her head away and stiffened herself and planted her feet firmly upon the ground.

"It's true a' yo've said, Adser, but it may have been for the best."

"Nay, that's against what you've said yoursen, that nothing that's bad and wrong can happen for the best."

"Do not be angry, Adser; come, lass, anyhow yo know I love yo."

"I do," she said, once more leaning towards him; "but what did you say to Mr. Lathkill?"

"I said it wasna a wise thing for yo to go there to th' Laurels—it made folks talk, and that your good name was dear to us, that yo were the jewel we most cherished, and that yo'd been tried on the wheel, as one might say, and no flaw found, and——"

"You couldna trust me, that's what you said." And she rose to her feet.

"No, it wasna," said Zodack, rising too, "but I said we couldna trust him."

"You did?"

"Aye," said Zodack, "I did."

"And you made me as cheap as that?"

"No, I didna cheapen yo!"

"You did when you said that," Adser replied.

"Sit down, Adser," said the old man, his lip quivering, his voice hard and commanding as Adser had never heard it before. They were both having new experiences of each other.

"I willna," she said.

"Sit down," said Zodack.

"I willna," she answered, facing him.

"Now I know that I said what was right and wise, and in time," said Zodack. "He's come between yo and me; he's come between your heart and freedom, between this cottage and the great world; he's been telling yo of London and fine cities, and what he calls life and pleasure."

"He hasna. What's come to you, Zodack?"

"Nay, what's come to thee, lass?"

"Nowt's come to me."

"Sit down, then!"

"Not when you speak to me like Nannie Blythe. If you go against me, Zodack, I'll——"

She did not finish the sentence, but put out her hand appealingly to Zodack, who bent over it and kissed it, and again drew the girl towards him, and they sat down once more together.

"I know yo are upset," he said, "and that's something unusual, and yo are innocent of so many things, that yo mun trust a bit to me, Adser. I'm not the man to cheapen yo, and I'm not the man to let anybody else do it; but listen to me, Adser, my love,—my daughter."

"Dear Zodack," murmured the girl.

"Your father's coming back,—nay, lass, donnat interrupt me. I know yo never want to see him. I know yo think it an old story. I know all that, but I know more than I've tow'd yo, more than I've tow'd your grandmother, and in this I've acted upon his instructions. Five year ago I heard from him in some wild region of America. His letter enclosed two hundred pounds. I was to use it for yo and your grandmother, if either on yo needed it. If not, I was to put it i' bank for his child—'his dear *deserted child*,' them were his words——"

"I don't value them," said Adser, "nor his money."

"I know," continued Zodack; "I heard no more for two years. Then he wrote to say he was ruined, otherwise he had hoped to come home rich, but for all that he sent a hundred pounds in a piece of scrip on th' Scarsdale Bank. Another year passed. He wrote that he was getting on again, and two hundred more come, wi' the same instructions, to say nowt to yo nor his mother about money unless yo needed it. And now I want to show yo something. Excuse me a minute——"

"Yes, Zodack, but I'm waitin' to hear all that you said to Mr. Lathkilll, and what he said when you said you couldn't trust him. You'd no right to say that."

"All in good time, Adser," replied Zodack, as he disappeared behind the blue curtain.

She followed him with her eyes until he disappeared, and then looked round the room with an unconscious sigh of farewell to all the old girlish, unsophisticated feelings which in the past had meant so much unconscious happiness. Her thoughts wandered away to the Laurels with an interest keener than any interest she had yet felt in mortal being.

Zodack came forth with two small cases in his hand.

"Now, lass, yo see this bit of pebble," he said.

He rolled it over in the palm of his hand.

"Felspar," she replied, indifferently.

Zodack took it up between his finger and thumb and held it up to the light.

"Alabaster," said the girl.

"No," said Zodack, his eyes fixed upon the pebble.

"Limestone," said Adser, laughing languidly, and with an idea that Zodack was only trying to lead her away from the subject nearest her heart.

"It's a diamond in the rough," said Zodack, fingering it lovingly. "Your father, Jessop Blythe, has sent it me to cut, but my tools will not touch it. It takes a diamond to cut a diamond."

"Is that all?" asked Adser.

"Diamond mates with diamond, gold with gold. Do yo know as gold willna hev owt to do i' the earth wi' baser metal, copper and lead, and the like?"

"What's that got to do wi' what you said to Mr. Lathkill?"

"Well, it has something to do wi' it, though I donnat see my way at the moment to say what," answered Zodack, looking into the girl's face from beneath his bushy eyebrows.

"Oh," said Adser.

"It's worth a big sum of money, that bit of stone," said Zodack, replacing it in its case and putting both into one of his many jacket pockets. "But I've gotten another you'll like best."

"I don't want to talk about such things," said Adser.

"Excuse me, love, but yo will," said Zodack. "Come here and sit by me." He took her hand. She stepped down from her chair. Zodack placed a cushion in the corner of the settle. Adser sat. Zodack took his place by her side. Then he drew from his jacket pocket—his jacket had all kinds of pockets, inside and out—another case.

"It came by the post," he said, "registered and insured. I had to sign quite a document for it."

"Oh," said Adser.

The corner of the inglenook was deftly chosen for displaying the contents of the second case. The hood of the settle partly shaded the sun so that a beam of light fell upon Zodack and Adser, leaving shadows all round them. Zodack brought out a small piece of black velvet and laid it in the palm of his hand, then opened the case and poured upon it two great sparkling liquid drops of petrified crystal, flamboyant dewdrops with reminiscences of the rainbow in their hearts. The sun straightway fell upon them as if to absorb them, but they only flashed the more, and Zodack rolled them about, and it seemed to Adser as if they would run together and become one and scatter at last as she had seen blobs on the brook.

"Oh!" the girl exclaimed. It was not her usual indefinite "*Oh,*" but a little cry of sudden surprise and delight.

"I knew they'd astonish yo," said Zodack. "I've been like a child wi' 'em myself, looking at them from this side and then from that, getting my lens on them. Nay, I donnat wonder at folks feighting about them, and at women goin' mad about them."

"Do they fight about them?" asked Adser, her deep blue eyes bent upon them.

"Wars and murders and sudden deaths and treacheries unheard of, my dear! I've always tow'd yo that such crystal things as I've cut into brooches is a rabbit burrow to High Peak Cavern or a rushlight to the sun, compared with a pure white diamond."

"Yes," said Adser, "I know. I've never seen aught as beautiful. They'd drive Sol Tidser wild."

"Diamonds have driven many a saner man wild, but yo're right. Sol's mightily set on bright stones and bits of Blue John, spa shavings, sparkles of coloured glass. Well, it shows that he's got an unconscious appreciation of colour, poor darkened soul. He'll be glad to see your father again. The lad doesn't look any older than he was twenty years ago—a mind at ease, I suppose, being a mind unoccupied."

"Put them into my hand," said Adser, taking no note of Zodack's remarks.

Zodack laid the stones in her open generous palm, without the velvet upon which they had lain in his.

"They're beautiful," she said, "and how cold, though you'd think there was fire in them."

"They are yours, Adser," he said, taking her hand and closing her fingers over them. "I will not tell yo how much they are worth; there's many a beautiful thing that's worth nowt to sell."

She opened her hand and looked first at the diamonds and then at Zodack.

"It's quite true, my dear, they are yours."

"How do you mean they're mine?"

"Your father's sent them for yo."

"I don't want them," she said, "take them back."

"But——"

"Take them back," she said, drily.

He opened his hand. She poured them into his hard palm.

"Adser, do yo know what yo're refusing?"

"Put them back into the box."

"Your father didna mek them any more than I make the bits of stone I cut, and which we all love to look at," said Zodack, putting the case into his pocket.

"But he sent them, and I donnat want nowt belonging to him."

"But, my dear, be reasonable."

"I am."

"Nay, lass, yo're not. Your father's a rich man. He wants to mek up to yo the wrong he's done in the past. He's coming home this time for sure."

"Very well," said Adser; "but you haven't told me what Mr. Lathkill said to you."

"I'm coming to it; yo cannot rightly understand our conversation until yo know what I've got to tell yo about your father. I want to read yo something from two newspapers he's sent me, American newspapers, and then we can talk freely about Mr. Lathkill."

"Very well," said Adser.

CHAPTER XVI

"LIGHT FROM THE 'KANSAS MOONBEAM.'"

"Now, love, sit i' th' easy chair and mek yourself comfortable," said Zodack, rising from his place and taking the girl's hand quite ceremoniously.

Adser, instead of vaulting into her familiar throne with a laugh as was customary with her, permitted herself to be assisted, which pleased the old man greatly.

"That's right," he said; "it's a strange story, I'll promise *yo; quite a romance.*"

Then he pushed aside the books and geological specimens on the many-legged round table, and drew from one of his numerous pockets two newspapers. He unfolded them and spread them out one over the other upon the table. Adser watched him with her thoughts far away, but held together with the one question, "What had Zodack Bradford said to Mr. Geoffrey Lathkill?"

"Now then," said Zodack, drawing a chair up to the table, "I want your undivided attention. These papers were sent me by your father. The first one is called the *Kansas Moonbeam*. It doesn't look much like a moonbeam; th' moon's a restful planet, this one's a dazzling dot-and-go-one kind o' thing that makes your eyes blink, its news is topheavy wi' titles, and it seems to shout like show folks at Castleton Fair, 'Walk up! walk up! Alive! alive! The only show in the Fair.' But that's nowt to do wi' the story; it's certainly a startling affair."

With which introduction, Zodack read the following article:

"After dinner at the Palmer House last night 'the king of diamonds' settled his bill and bought a first-class ticket to Topeka. Then he jumped into a coupé and was driven to the dépôt. His hundred and eight diamonds went with him.

"His name is Adser—plain Jim Adser—and he is British born. He came to this country nigh upon twenty year ago, and was first in at the Bluffs when the boys struck over. In the preceding fight with the Indians he was the best dare-devil of all the frontiersmen. Until he struck a lead which has made others rich besides himself he was nigh ever sober. He could drink the heads off any dozen live Americans. But the day he got his British hand on metal he stopped drinking and became respectable. Though he's an Englishman, he's got all the habits and qualities of the free land of America, he's one of the best, and he married one of the girls. She was all his own painting her, and they kept house on a fine scale in Kansas City. She gave high-toned parties and he was

welcome everywhere, a hearty, pleasant, free, open-handed citizen, no British side, no bluffing, a genuine old-timer in his sentiments and opinions. Furthermore, in the way of making him popular, he could sing a good song, and one in particular which is the composition of our own American poet, Payne, "After Many Roving Years;" and during the Indian fighting the boys delighted to get him to whistle to them, and he was never too drunk to warble equal to any of the professionals who have held the concert stage in Kansas City. He has caught the practical spirit of our labour-saving machinery and institutions. In the gorgeous Orient the Sultans and Pashas and other big bosses never dance themselves; they just hire women to do that for them, while they sit and smoke the hookah. Well, Jim, he's a bit of an Oriental in his way, as well as a practical Americanised citizen of the great West. He carries a musical box with him; it is a wonderful concern of its kind, was invented, it seems, by a young German whom Jim befriended, and who is building a factory in Chicago to turn out a thousand boxes a week; it is different from the ordinary thing in the fact that it has sets of discs each with a different tune, and one box will go on playing until the angel Gabriel sounds the last trump if it is only supplied with discs enough, and there is no reason why you shouldn't, Jim says, get a wagon-load of them in time. In return for Jim's help the inventor made him a special collection of the tunes he likes, and now he says it ain't necessary for him to whistle, he makes the box whistle for him, and it's got all his favourite tunes,—“After Many Roving Years,” “Happy Land,” “Home, Sweet Home,” “The Men of Harlech,” “Hail, Smiling Morn,” and a heap of others. It certainly is a great invention. Jim takes the box to bed with him, and it sings him to sleep. He's a great old baby is this British American, you bet!

“Funny, isn't it?” said Zodack, looking up at Adser.

“Do you think it's true?”

“Oh, yes,” said Zodack; “there are thousands of things *more ingenious than an automatic musical box.*”

"Oh," said Adser, "it seems strange that Jessop Blythe should have such a thing."

"Do yo think so?" said Zodack, "but not stranger than the diamonds. He had a curious kind of a streak in his composition, something that, I suppose, had no chance to penetrate the density of his intellectual epidermis, as learned folk would say."

"I don't know what you mean," said Adser.

"It doesn't matter, love; let's go on with our American newspaper. It is as interesting as a romance." He bent over the Kansas record once more and read as follows:

"And now comes the curious part of Jim's character, a touch of the old stocking idea of finance that is not unknown in New England, but is foreign to the manners and customs of this more enlightened State of the Union. The old country is full of stockings, and in France every cottager boasts one, so that the enterprising burglar when he is on the war-path has a right good old time in the out-lying gloom of an effete civilisation. Some years ago they emptied their stockings into Lesseps's canal. The old hose is beginning to fill up again, ready for the next war indemnity. But to return to Jim Adser; we are sorry to keep him waiting. He has been a widower ten years, and now he wears a pair of diamond garters. No, they were not his wife's, nor any other woman's. He had them made for himself. He sold his wife's diamonds and put the proceeds into a New York bank. But that is an incident by the way—Jim's garters constitute an important part of his possessions. If ever a man deserved the title of "diamond king" that man is this self-same Jim Adser, fifth share-owner of the silver mine at the Bluffs. His manly form is literally studded with diamonds and his surplus supply is incrustated in his tobacco-pouch, not where you can see them. Oh no, Jim knows better than that. Jim has no faith in banks and safe-deposit companies. His dividends from the mine, payable monthly, are invested in United States bonds. Nobody knows where he keeps his scrip but every thousand dollars that comes to him in cash

either from interest on the bonds or from his ordinary business undertakings, and he has many, are turned into diamonds. He has been indulging in this strange fancy for over seven years. When he buys a diamond he has it set in a golden button, which he sews into a part of his clothing where it cannot be seen. He has in all a hundred and eight of these precious buttons, averaging all round about four carats, the whole worth over a hundred thousand dollars.

“Some seven or eight years ago there was a panic in New York. The Empire city gets off this kind of financial racket now and again. A bank in which Mr. Adser had accumulated on deposit and in shares two hundred thousand dollars, busted, and he didn't get out of the fire a single red cent. So the Anglo-American, after going on a bender, his very last, came to the conclusion that he would never trust banks again, unless he should ever return to England with money enough to open an account at the Bank of England. A friend advised him that he could do that from here; he could remit through an American bank; but much as he had learnt on this side the ferry, the Britisher had still got the stocking streak in his nature, and he declined to trust an American bank, even as a medium of communication. “Then what will you do?” asked his partner. “I'll buy diamonds,” he said, “and keep 'em out of sight.” “In a stocking?” asked the other. “No, I guess I'll invest in a pair of garters that I'll have welted above the knee, so that they'll never come off.” His pard thought he had gone mad, but he hadn't; or, if he had, there was a good deal of method in it. With his first thousand he bought a pure white diamond, had it set in a button, and himself stitched the button with a cordwainer's needle and thread upon his garter—a curious idea; but he's a curious chap is Jim Adser. And so Old Time rolled on. When the garters were full, Jim decorated his belt; when he thought he had enough there he lined his waistcoat with the flashing jewels; then he worked some into his tobacco pouch, or a few *under the lining of his hat.*

"Last night he had an uneasy fit on him; thought he was being laid for. It would go hard with any thief who attempted Jim; with the strength of a giant he combines the readiness of a pioneer; he would shoot before a fellow could wink; but, as we say, he felt uneasy, and he hates being called upon to defend himself, so he got up in the middle of the night and concluded to put his things in the hotel safe. He therefore takes off his garters, his waistcoat, his belt, and his soft felt hat—there were half a dozen stones in the crown of it—and goes to the hotel clerk and he says, "I want to put my waistcoat, my garters, my hat, and my belt in the hotel safe; give me a cheque, and I will come down for them in the morning."

"You could have knocked the hotel clerk over with the breath of a half-grown canary. A lodger who wanted the safe opened upon such a pretence was either a thief or a lunatic. The clerk placed one hand over his gleaming shirt-stud and allowed his other hand to go on a quiet hunt for the burglar alarm. He could only stammer out, "Did you say waistcoat and garters?"

"Adser could not persuade the clerk that everything was right and proper, until he undid the bundle and showed the glistening baubles the articles of apparel contained. Of course the clerk thereupon put the precious goods in the safe and gave Adser the cheque.

"Just before Adser started for Topeka, last night, he was interviewed by a reporter. He talked a good deal about his diamonds, and then pleaded that the reporter would keep the story out of the papers. But the story was too good for an amiable compliance with the request.

"However," he said at parting, "if I get back to New York all right, I shall go to the British consul and see if I can't get the security of his government somehow for my money, and then——"

"He paused and smiled. The reporter, all alert, said, "Yes, and then?"

"Well, I guess that's my own secret at present," Adser replied, and nothing the reporter could say or do would in-

duce the diamond king to explain what was the nature of his secret.'"

Zodack folded up the newspaper, and as he laid it on one side he looked at Adser. She had made a comfortable corner for herself in the great old chair, squeezing all the cushions together and tucking her feet between the upper bar and the seat. When Zodack turned his eyes upon her, she was rubbing the arm of the chair with her open left hand. Zodack feared she had heard the story with indifference, but it had interested her.

"A curious story, Adser, eh?"

"He must have been as silly as Sol Tidser," she said; "why, tramps that come to Castleton Saturdays would have had that waistcoat."

"Do yo know, Adser, it struck me i' that way; but yo see your father carried pistols and was a strong man."

"My father?" said Adser. "I thought his name was Jim Adser."

"He took that name, it seems, when he went to America; but he was your father, all the same."

"Oh!" said Adser.

"You'll hear what he has to say about that i' this other paper."

"Very well," said Adser, resignedly.

"I'll tell yo about Mr. Lathkill all i' good time," said Zodack, "but it's my duty to let yo see what your position is. I might just hev tow'd yo the bald facts, but it seemed to me you'd like to know inside th' whole business."

He put this to Adser interrogatively, and waited her answer.

"Yes, Zodack Bradford, and thank you; but I've not heard anything at present that is likely to mek me change my opinion of the man who is my father."

"But yo may," said Zodack; "and you're his heiress, mind yo, Adser. You're a rich woman, as well off, may be, as Mr. Lathkill, and perhaps better off; for in his letter to *me*, which is private most of it, he says he wishes to settle *on yo during his lifetime* twenty thousand, to mek yo in-

dependent. That's at least eight hundred pounds a year, Adser, and he will do this, he says, whether yo hate him or love him, or whatever yo may think of him; and if yo hate him it'll mek no difference. And I think, Adser, that is noble conduct."

"It is na like him," said Adser.

"'I've been a brute,' he writes to me, 'but I knowed the good sort I was leaving my child amongst; not as I wish to defend myself, but I will not wait to know whether she despises me or not, I shall make this settlement on my daughter before I leave New York.' And he has done it."

Zodack paused. Adser did not speak.

"Don't yo understand?"

"Yes," she said.

"Yo are worth twenty thousand pounds."

"Yes."

"Yo are a match for any man."

"Is that what Mr. Lathkill said?"

"No, I did not speak of this to Mr. Lathkill."

"Oh," said Adser.

"Yo are overcome with this great news, my child," said Zodack.

"Am I?" she said.

"It took my breath away."

"Did it?" said Adser.

"But yo'll get over it by and bye. Let me read yo this other paper."

He took up a copy of the New York *Herald*.

"It begins with a heap of headings or titles like this,—
'The Diamond King Abdicates,—The Strange Story of Jim Adser, otherwise Jessop Blythe,—An Anglo-American Romance,—The hero starts for home with vouchers for a million dollars,—Curious combination of Shrewdness and Simplicity.' Then it prints from the *Kansas Moonbeam* the article I have just read to yo. Are yo listening, Adser?"

"Yes, Zodack," she answered.

And following the Kansas report it goes on in this way,—

"'Yes,' said Mr. Jim Adser, 'it's all true enough what

you've read me from the *Kansas Moonbeam*, though I didn't want them to print it. When I picked up the paper and saw that they'd given me away, it made me hurry up a plan I'd already formed. And that's why I'm in New York two weeks earlier than I expected.'

"The Anglo-American speaks a peculiar dialect of the West mixed with an English provincialism. He is a frank-looking-man of something over fifty, with grey hair and a moustache and beard that are perfectly white. His complexion is tanned with the weather but ruddy; the face recalls a picture of the Viking stamp, and he is a well-built fellow, and with a steady eye and reposeful manner. The *Herald* man found him in his room at the Gilsey House, and he was smoking a small black pipe. He does not drink himself, but he invited the *Herald* man to partake of some wine, and ordered a bottle of dry champagne over which and a cigarette the 'Press' chatted with the 'diamond king.'

"Then you have converted the diamonds into specie?" asked the reporter.

"I took the consul's advice, and he has undertaken to convey my money to the Bank of England. No, I have not sold out my interest in the mine at the Bluffs. The consul advised me not. I never came upon a more obliging man than the consul. It wasn't his business, he said, but as countryman to countryman he would see me through the thing. I told him the whole of my story, and we quite took to each other; I mean to get him to accept something for his trouble, though he was angry when I mentioned it.'

"You say you told him the whole of your story. Won't you tell it to me?"

"Oh, I don't know that I've any objection; no reason why all the world shouldn't know, if it wants to. My name isn't Jim Adser at all. Adser is a family name. Jim was the Christian name of my father; and my only daughter is called Adser. She was a baby when I left England, hadn't even been christened; but I've a friend out yonder who's told me things once in a way, and he says my daughter is the loveliest and the best girl that ever lived.'"

"Zodack!" exclaimed Adser.

"It's perfectly true," said Zodack, looking up.

"And you've been writing letters to him?"

"Only one or two, Adser."

"And you didn't tell me?"

"He pledged me to secrecy until such time as he should give me permission to speak."

"When did you first hear from him?"

"Five years back."

"Then for nigh upon fifteen years he took no interest in me; didn't know whether mother was dead or alive, and I might have been in th' workhouse. And does he think I'm going to forget that? Does he think I'm going to forget how he left my poor mother to die under the roof of his bitter old harri-dane of a mother, with me in her poor, dear, loving arms? If he does, he doesna know Adser Blythe."

Adser leaped from her seat and paced the room, hurling defiance and rebukes at her father. Zodack followed her, and drew her arm within his own and led her to the settle.

"Whatever yo say or do, Adser, I shall always love yo as a father."

"And I shall always love and honour you, Zodack Bradford," she replied, leaning her head upon his shoulder and bursting into tears.

"There, there, my dear, don't do that; it makes my heart ache; besides, I want yo to be strong and calm, to keep your mind clear, and not be emotional. It is right that yo should know all before yo decide anything. Now sit there, my love, and listen to the rest of this New York *Herald* statement."

Adser seated herself among the cushions in a corner of the settle, and Zodack turned towards her and concluded the newspaper story.

"And where is your home in England?" the reporter asked.

"Castleton, in Derbyshire."

"And your name?"

"Jessop Blythe. I didn't get on with my wife; my own

fault, I think. I was a roper, and the society turned me out because I got drunk; and I was down on my luck, not that I ever cared for th' life at Castleton; thought it humdrum and rubbish; always wanted to see the world; had a notion I could do summat in foreign countries. I'd seen lead mining broken up in Derbyshire because lead was easier to get abroad; had often heard on market-days about gowd and silver mining in America, and so at last I chucked it all and walked out of Castleton with five pounds, and worked my way out on board a freight steamer from Liverpool. You know all about the prospecting I was in, and the fight with the Indians, and the discovery of silver at the Bluffs, and how I was one of the first there, and so on——'

"' Yes; what I am curious to know about is why you are going home, and what you propose to do? "

"' Well, somehow, I've got homesick, and I want to see my daughter; and I've a hankering to see a young lad I sort of adopted, a Welsh chap; then there's Zodack Bradford, a lapidary, and a regular character; you'd mek much of a man like that if you had him in America; then there's my mother, and I'd like to see the chaps at the rope-walk. I've arranged with Zodack Bradford that the ropers and their friends shall have a feast; it's a kind of fancy of mine that they shall have a big affair in the cavern where they work. Yes, it's a cavern, and they call it God's factory, because it's God's place,—was never made by the hands of man,—and I've had a silver tobacco-box made for every one of the men and a little diamond brooch made for every one of the women; and I tell you Castleton's going to have a rare old time.'

"' And have you parted with all your diamonds? "

"' Why, yes; most of 'em. I sent one in the rough to Zodack Bradford, the lapidary, and told him to cut it. I guess that'll bother him; he only deals with local stones, spa and limestone and the Blue John deposit, and once in a way a bit of coral or a cameo. His tools will turn up on a diamond; and then I sent two fine cut stones to my daughter. Zodack says my daughter is not to be won over by material

wealth, and that she has reason to feel bad against me; but I'm penitent, and I have settled a big sum on her before I know whether she's going to be friendly or not, so that, whether she is or not, I've done my duty by her.'

"'They say you are taking to England vouchers for a million dollars?'

"'Well, I haven't counted it up, but it's a goodish bit of money.'

"'It has been a fine thing for you that you came to America?'

"'Well, yes, I'm grateful; and it hasna been bad for America. I have fought and worked all the time, and it's good for a country to have its resources developed, whoever does it; not that I've anything but what's friendly to say. I like the country, and I don't think there's anything finer than a canvas-back duck, except an English sirloin of beef.'

"'I did not know that you were an epicure,' said the reporter.

"'Do you mean fond of good things to eat? Oh, I like my food, and there was a time when I liked my drink; dare say I should now if I could be temperate, but I can't, so I'm teetotal. Yes, tea and coffee and lemonade and ice-water; that's the sort of liquors I patronize. When I struck that lead of silver, I felt I'd no more time to get drunk. When I was at home in Castleton I'd nothing else to do. And, besides, out yonder at the Bluffs a man had to keep his eyes open and his hand steady.'

"'You have been in some tough places?'

"'Oh, that's no matter; when it's who gets his pistol out first saves his life, a man must be spry.'

"'And you were very spry on several occasions, I have heard.'

"'Oh, well, that's neither here nor there; we won't talk about that,' said the Anglo-American, who, at that moment having a call at the telephone, took my proffered hand and said, 'Good-bye.'

"'The reporter left the Gilsey House impressed with the shrewdness and simplicity of Jessop Blythe, who is un-

doubtedly a remarkable specimen of that class of Englishmen who find the "tight little island" too small for their ambition, and regard the entire world as their own particular field of enterprise and adventure.'"

Zodack folded the paper and looked at Adser, expecting some remark from her, but she was intent upon the door. Her ears had caught the sound of voices that interested her more deeply than the story of her father, Jessop Blythe.

"It's Mr. Lathkill," he said; "'Stingy Blythe' is arguing wi' him."

Then Zodack heard Mrs. Blythe's voice and Lathkill's in response.

"Open the door, Zodack Bradford," said Adser.

Zodack laid aside his newspaper and went to the door, which he unlatched and flung open, whereupon there entered Mr. Geoffrey Lathkill and Mrs. Blythe.

"I told him yo was engaged, and wouldna ever let me in," said Mrs. Blythe, looking daggers at Adser. "Though what yo'n gotten to talk about as I may not hear, caps me. Adser Blythe, get yo down into th' kitchen."

Adser did not move.

"No, excuse me; I want Adser to stay here," said Zodack.

"Things has come to a pretty pass while child's grandmother's gotten no more weight nor a bean-stick, but——"

"We'll talk of that later," said Zodack. "Good-day agin, Mr. Lathkill."

"Good-day, Mr. Bradford, and what a splendid day it is. I shall miss your pure bright atmosphere, I'm thinking. I have come to say good-bye."

"Good-bye!" exclaimed Adser, her naturally pale face several tones paler on the moment, and her lips trembling.

"Yes, Miss Blythe, I am leaving Castleton." Then turning to Zodack, he remarked, "I could not go without saying adieu."

"No, I suppose not," said Zodack, looking anxiously at Adser.

Then Lathkill looked round slightly embarrassed, and, putting out his hand, said,—

"Good-bye, Mrs. Blythe."

"Oh, well, I wish yo good-bye, sir, and thank yo for all your favours; and I'n gotten that chalice and the two-foot vase that yo liked; I'll go and get them ready for yo," said Mrs. Blythe, who never allowed anything to interfere with business.

"Thank you very much," said Lathkill, opening the door for the grim old lady.

"Good-bye, Mr. Bradford," said Lathkill, offering his hand to Zodack.

"Good-bye," said Zodack, slowly, and holding his hand the while. "I'm sorry for th' occasion of your going, but there's no gem so heavenly bright as honour."

"Then," said Adser, her words clean cut and firm, "that's what Mr. Lathkill said to you,—that he was going away?"

She turned her pale face towards Zodack and, crossing her arms over her bosom, looked like an accusing angel.

"Yes, my love," said Zodack.

"And what reason did he give you for deciding to go away all in a minute?"

"What reason did yo give me, Mr. Lathkill?" Zodack asked, turning from Adser to Lathkill.

"It is an embarrassing question," said Lathkill.

"The truth is not embarrassing; it's only embarrassing when you try to hide it," said Adser, moving nearer to Zodack, and steadying herself with one hand upon the arm of the old settle.

"That's right," said Zodack. "Tell her, Mr. Lathkill."

"My dear Miss Blythe, to be frank, and to put the case simply, I found I liked you, to use the mildest phrase, and I flattered myself I was not disagreeable to you; so I thought I had better go away."

"Oh, because you found me a pleasant neighbour, you thought you'd shut your doors against me," said Adser.

"But I had already offended you, I regret to say."

"No, you hadn't; you'd only annoyed me."

"Nothing was further from my thoughts."

"And you're going away on my account?"

"Mr. Tregarron thinks my presence here an offence."

"Mr. Tregarron," said Adser, scornfully. "Mr. Tregarron's not my keeper."

"Mr. Bradford seemed to be of opinion that I was doing the right thing in leaving."

"Zodack Bradford's too fond of me," said Adser.

"Then I was told that people were talking in Castle-ton, and——"

"As you've gotten no mind of your own, you let other folks lead you, and all the time niver say a word to th' person most concerned; very well, Mr. Lathkill—good-bye."

"But, Miss Blythe, I was only thinking of you, believe me."

"Good-bye, Mr. Lathkill, I've gotten no more to say."

"I will leave yo a moment," said Zodack, responding to a look from Lathkill.

"You needn't," said Adser. But Zodack left the room.

"Miss Blythe, Adser," said Lathkill, "you misunderstand me."

"I hope I do."

"I dare not trust myself to stay."

"Dare not trust yourself; what do you mean?"

"I hardly know."

"You think you've made me love you. You're mistaken. You think I should hev been as weak as yonder lass wi' her baby at Wheat Sheaf. You're mistaken. You think, because I'm a country lass, I know nowt, and that I should be fooled wi' your honeyed words. Do you know why you offended me? Because you laid your hand on me as if you'd gotten the right. I wanted you to know that; and I want you to know this. I could have loved you with all my heart. It was the first time in my life I'd ever felt anything like love, except as a daughter to Zo-

dack Bradford; and if you'd been a roper, or a lapidary, or a Castleton farmer, I'd have let you understand. And now you know me, Geoffrey! And you can tek away wi' you my good will, for I've spent many happy hours in your company. So good-bye."

A tear trickled down her cheek as she put out her hand. Lathkill pressed her fingers to his lips.

"You think me a coward," he said, his voice trembling; "and you are right. You despise me—I despise myself."

He still held Adser's hand. The touch of his lips had softened her. Her heart was beating violently.

"Say you forgive me," he said, and he drew her towards him.

"I forgive you," she said.

Yesterday, if he had put his arm round her waist, she would probably have struck him. Love has a silent language that speaks in the loudest accents to those who are destined to hear it.

"Adser, I love you," said Lathkill, and the girl permitted herself to be drawn into his arms, "be my wife."

She pushed back her tears and looked up into Lathkill's face like the sun shining through an April shower.

"Say yes, Adser; I want to hear you say yes."

"It was because I loved you that I ran away from you," she said, laying her head upon his shoulder.

"And for the same reason you said you didn't love me?"

"Yes."

"Adser, we shall be the happiest couple in the world."

"I hope so," said Adser.

"What do you think, Mr. Bradford?" said Lathkill, as Zodack, having knocked at the door, entered to see Lathkill placing a chair for Adser, who was all smiles and tears, "don't you think we shall make a happy couple?"

"Is that the situation?" asked Zodack, his eyes brightening.

"I have asked Adser to be my wife."

"Has she told yo what I'd been reading to her?"

"She has only told me that she doesn't love me, and that I was a coward, and so on."

"No, no," said Adser; "don't believe him, Zodack Bradford; he is only jesting. I have told him that I love him, and shall feel proud and honoured to be his wife."

"My own dear Adser," exclaimed Lathkill.

"Mr. Lathkill, I congratulate yo," said Zodack Bradford; "the best and sweetest girl in the world is Adser Blythe, and another thing, that doesna matter so much, she'll bring yo a fortune in solid gold."

"She can bring me no greater fortune than herself," said Lathkill; "and now, to step down to the ordinary and regular world, I want you to bring her to my studio this evening and have tea. Will you? I am not going away now, you know."

"We will come," said Zodack.

CHAPTER XVII.

LOVE'S YOUNG DREAM.

ZODACK, in his best high-collared coat and his flowered waistcoat, and Adser, with a pair of new high-heeled shoes from Jerry Bray's, at Upper Buxton, and in her now autumn gown, started for the Laurels. Mrs. Blythe sat by her table in front of the cottage. The old lady cast a critical glance at Adser's grey serge dress, with its white collar and cuffs, and her new Sunday bonnet, an arrangement of black velvet tied under her chin. It irritated her to see how more and more Adser grew like her mother, who was reckoned in her girlhood to be one of the prettiest girls in all the Peak country; but it never occurred to her to think how she had thrown herself away on her good-for-nothing son. The hardness of her heart had never softened to Adser from the moment she was born, in spite of the *generous impulse* that had induced her to shelter the deserted

mother when Jessop had turned his back upon her and become a drunken loafer, to be eventually the shame and sorrow of God's factory.

"Fine feathers mek fine birds," she said, as Zodack bade her good-evening, "but it isna a' gowd that glitters."

"Thank yo, all th' same," Zodack replied, with a smile. "Yo're just a bit vague, but yo mean well, Mrs. Blythe."

"That's as yo tek it," she said, nursing her crutch-stick.

"Oh, we take it wi' faith, as visitors take your Derbyshire crystals," Zodack replied.

"They're like your wit, Zodack Bradford; they'n gotten to serve in th' absence o' something better."

"Yo've been polishing up yours, Mrs. Blythe," said Zodack. "It's a pity to waste it on two such inoffensive persons as me and Adser."

"We shall see what we shall see, Zodack Bradford."

"If we are not blind," said Zodack. "We shall never, even wi' all our eyes, see a crab walk straight forrad nor a hen that doesna scrape. But I hate proverbs, Mrs. Blythe."

"And I hate double faces; but go your ways, both on yo—you'n better company than me waitin' for yo; I'm nobbut a lonely owd woman; but just yo wait a bit till our Jessop comes home, I'll let yo see!"

"Good-evening, Mrs. Blythe; we'll have a chat when yo're less proverbial and more neighbourly."

Adser had stood silently on the foot-path during this little sparring between Zodack and Mrs. Blythe, and looked across the brook as if she had no interest in the conversation, but the old lady gave her a parting shot as the girl moved away with Zodack.

"Marry above yo and yo'll get a mester—and that's what yo need, my lass!"

"She's got something more than common in her mind," said Adser. "She speaks so slow, and drags her mouth down like a lad's bow, and her nasty sayings might be th' arrows they shoot at targets."

"I towd her of your engagement to Mr. Lathkill," said

Zodack. "It seems to have vexed her a bit; I hoped it would have woke up her bit o' family pride."

"Why, Zodack Bradford, she hates me enough in her dry old heart to laugh if I was that lass i' the gutter they talk of at the Wheat Sheaf; to think of me happy in my marriage would make her madder than she was when she hit me wi' her stick, and madder than I was when I flung a basin of water in her face."

"Adser, my dear, yo were wrong to do that."

"I know; you said so at the time; but her stick didna hurt me so much as the foul thing she ca'd me. It's awful to think what I might have been if I'd been of my father's disposition, instead of taking after my mother."

"But, Adser," said Zodack, "yo'll have to control your angry impulses now; th' best victory in life is to vanquish our bad impulses."

"I never should have been anything but amiable and good-tempered, if I hadn't had such a harridan to deal with."

"I know that, my love; and yo've always been amiable and sweet to me; but a woman without patience is like a lamp without oil."

"Nannie Blythe's set you on wi' proverbs now," said Adser, laughing.

"I take no stock in her kind of proverbs," said Zodack, "but I want yo just to think a bit about your new position. Yo see, this Mr. Lathkill's a gentleman. He's been accustomed to very different society and manners to what he's seen here i' Castleton."

"You mean he's too good for me?"

"I don't mean anything of the kind; the man doesna live that's too good for yo, Adser."

"You're too fond of me to be a judge, dear Zodack Bradford," Adser replied.

"I've made inquiries about this Mr. Lathkill. Not that I had any suspicion that all wasna reight, but I thought it 'ud be better to get an independent opinion; so, when I was at Buxton last week, I just axed Duke's agent about him, and he said he was a gentleman of independent means, a

great traveller, a man as had risked his life for his country, a kind of genius wi' his pen and his brush, handy wi' his gun, and had a house of his own i' London, though he was rarely there, spendin' his time i' travelling; and he said it was a compliment to Castleton to have a gentleman of such wide experience of th' world making a long stay among us."

"Oh!" said Adser.

"I tow'd agent I liked Mr. Lathkill from first minute I set eyes on him, but I didna tell him why I was curious about him."

"Why?" asked Adser.

"Well, I didna think it necessary."

"But why were you so curious about him?"

"Because I could see that yo were gettin' to like him above a bit."

"Oh!" said Adser.

"And further, because I could see that he was getting mighty fond of yo, which wasna but natural."

"Oh!" said Adser.

"And then I thought it was time Tregarron knowed his fate one way or t'other."

"How knowed his fate?"

"Why, the poor chap has been i' love wi' yo for years."

"Then he's a fool," said Adser, quickly.

"Nay, not so fast," Zodack replied. "And I want yo to begin th' habit of self-restraint; yo must modify your language."

"About Lewis Tregarron?" the girl asked, with a pleasant expression of inquiry in her eyes, that were not sufficiently shaded by her Sunday bonnet. She had to raise her hand for protection against the sun, that was hot with its afternoon journey to the west.

"Not only with reference to Tregarron, but altogether."

"Tregarron ought to have seen that I didna like him in that way. He should study folk, and not take the world from book-reading."

"He's studied his own desires, as most on us do," said Zodack.

"But that isn't my fault," Adser replied, now free from the direct assault of the sun. "It's nice to get into the shade," she added, not caring to continue the conversation in the direction that Zodack had directed it; "the garden at the Laurels only gets the morning sun, it faces south."

"What I mean is this," said Zodack; "girls shouldna use men's words."

"How do you mean?" the girl asked; "I've heard you say you hated monopolies."

Adser thought this a very good shot. She knew it always pleased Zodack when she remembered some special saying of his, whether she quite understood it or not.

"So I do, all monopolies except what springs from brains and industry; but that isna the question. Yo shouldna, for instance, say 'fool,' and 'want-rope,' and 'beast,' and 'never-sweat,' and the like."

"When have I said 'never-sweat,' and the like? I said 'fool' just now, I know."

"Well, it isna womanly."

"I'm not a woman."

"Mr. Lathkill thinks yo are."

"Does he?" she answered, somewhat subdued.

"I amna lecturing yo, Adser, my love; I'm only advising yo."

"It seems like going on at me."

"But it isna; it's only good advice. Yo must try and modify your language, it's too—what shall I say?—well, it's too strong, let us say too masculine, too much like th' common folk about the village, women who've had no education."

"Oh," said Adser, a friendly "Oh."

"Yo've gotten to live up to th' new position your husband will give yo."

"Well, I shall, if ever we are married."

"If ever yo're married! There's no 'ifs' about it, my lass—both on yo being alive—when th' day's fixed."

"But it's all happened in such a hurry, seems to me. *I often doant know whether it's real or a tale out of a book.*"

"It's real enough, Adser."

"Well, what do you want me to do? To talk fine, like the new curate from the South?"

"Nay, I love to hear th' roundness o' th' Northern dialect; but yo clip your words too much. Yo see we'n gotten a mixture o' Yorkshire and Derbyshire i' these hills and dales that run into each other, and yo've a habit—nay, I've gotten it myself—I amna denying what's sauce for th' goose isna sauce for th' gander—I say, we'n both a habit of killing consonants for th' sake o' th' vowels; we'n gotten a dialect and——"

"Eh, but you are goin' on to-day, Zodaack Bradford!" she exclaimed, pausing to emphasize the remark; "I cannot make you out."

"What I mean is that yo can be natural and still be what they call refined i' your language. Look at your dress!"

"Well, what's the matter wi' my dress?" she replied, looking down at her well cut skirt and her new shoes.

"Nowt; it's perfect, it's a picture—you're a picture. I'n never seen yo look so much like a young lady—so much above what th' curate would ca' your station i' life. And I only want yo to live up to it."

"Just now you wanted me to live up to the position my husband would give me; now you want me to live up to my new dress," she answered, the tone of her voice pronouncing the pleasure that Zodaack's criticism had given her.

"It's th' same thing. I want yo to be as pretty and as decorous in your conversation, as dainty in your words as yo are in your dressmaking and millinery."

"And you've only just found out that I am not good enough for Mr. Lathkill; you'll say it's the same thing."

"No, I won't; and I think yo're good enough for the best gentleman that ever lived," said Zodaack, ringing out his opinion as if he challenged the whole world to meet him on that question.

"But I must mind my p's and q's with Mr. Lathkill, and

not call folks fools. Why didn't you tell me this long ago? I cannot alter myself all in a minute."

"My dear, I have often checked yo in regard to your speech."

"Only in fun," she said, "and now you're in earnest, but you're late, Zodack, like Lewis Tregarron; anyhow, if I'm not good enough for Mr. Geoffrey Lathkill, I'm too good for Lewis Tregarron, I can tell you that!"

"My dear, he and yo have been companions since yo were a child."

"We'n played together, gone bird's-nesting, helped in Squire Ruth's hay-fields, climbed th' hills together, run races, and the like; but what's that? I'd just as soon think of brushing up Sol Tidser's hearth as Lewis Tregarron's."

"He's a clever chap—knows French, can read a bit o' Latin, knows history o' th' world, and's gotten very shrewd ideas of ethics, and advanced notions of religion. I shouldna wonder he's a great man some day, Lewis Tregarron. They call him 'Member for Wales,' yo know, some o' them political chaps, and he's often said to me he'd like to go forth as a missionary, or an explorer—he's always been bent on doing something."

Adser had scarcely paid any attention to Zodack's eulogium of Tregarron, and the lapidary had seemed to be partly talking to himself, but the last words caught her ear, and she turned her head to ask, "And why hasn't he done something?"

"He couldna leave Castleton," said Zodack.

"Why not?"

"Because he hated to go to a place where Adser Blythe wasna living."

"A fine missionary to let that stop him!"

"I doant know so much about that. It would ha' stopped me, Adser."

"Oh, but that's another thing. I wouldna have let you go wi'out me, Zodack Bradford," Adser replied, looking up into his sober face, which was now all smiles.

"Ah, well, Adser, what will be will be. I shall live to see yo a grand lady."

"Rubbish, Zodack!"

"Nay, it isna rubbish. I was once i' London when I was a lad. It puzzles me to think how folk can live i' such a muck and row; but they tell me there's houses wi' gardens i' the place, and even fields they ca' parks, wi' trees and lakes. I nivver seed nowt of em; I only seed bricks and mortar, and streets full o' people, and carriages, and carts, and wagons, and policemen, and I should think they might want a lot o' policemen to keep 'em in order—it's a pity Staley Brentwood doesna transfer his services to London."

"He's hateful enough for any place, is Staley Brentwood," she replied, and by this time they were at the gates of the Laurels.

Mrs. Midwinter received them. Mr. Lathkill had made her acquainted with the new relationship between himself and Adser. He had also informed her that Miss Blythe and her guardian were coming to tea, and that he would like fruit and flowers on the table, and some little special attention paid to Miss Blythe on the occasion of her first visit to the Laurels as his affianced wife. Mrs. Midwinter had congratulated him, but with a certain reserve, and a covert sneer at the Blythe family. She had nevertheless placed several extra jugs of flowers about the studio, and a rare vase full of the last roses of summer on the tea-table. Moreover, Mr. Perrywick was there to assist Mrs. Midwinter in handing the tea around, and making Adser feel uncomfortable. She felt that Perrywick, who was an observant if silent man, was watching her all the time. Geoffrey noticed her embarrassment, and presently told Perrywick he need not remain, and so Adser and Zodack and Geoffrey were left alone. After tea they walked into the garden.

From the day that Lathkill drove into Castleton, August had drifted into September. It was Autumn now. The heather on the moors had put on its purple gown. The

Vale of Hope stretching away below Castleton showed here and there patches of golden stubbles. Such small crops of wheat as are grown thereabouts had been gathered in. At distant intervals there was a tone of rich green from turnip and wurzel; but these tokens of active and varied agriculture were mere incidents in the vast sweep of pasture land that was cut into squares and triangles by grey stone walls. Once in a way there was a homestead and a clump of browning trees, and the sun showed varying lights upon the gloomy mountains that rose up to the sky in gradual curves and hillocks.

The hollyhocks in Mrs. Midwinter's garden were in their full glory, pink and red and white, veritable pyramids of bloom. The roses were all over the place in fading blooms, the beds thick with fallen leaves. On the other hand there were white and yellow species that climbed the walls, and adorned the house with great clumps of flowers. Autumn brooded over some of the beds, and the distant hills were brown and their stony ridges plain to see. It was one of those Autumn evenings when the brightness of the sky, and what Howitt calls "the diaphanous purity of the atmosphere," suggest Eastern climates and constant sunshine.

Geoffrey referred to this, and spoke of Egypt and Italy. "There the skies are intensely blue," he said, "and in South America they are often a deep opal even at night when the stars are shining, so that it is a glory of blue and silver."

"We have some fine effects i' th' Peak," said Zodack, not willing quietly to admit that any other country could show much that was better in the way of mountain mists, Autumn glows. "Now and agin we've Northern Lights, glimpses of Aurora Borealis."

"Yours is a lovely county," said Geoffrey. "You think so, don't you, Adser?"

"Yes; but I'm not so prejudiced as Zodack Bradford, who thinks God made every other place after th' Peak, where He did his best."

"There's nothing like patriotism," said Geoffrey.

"*Is that patriotism?*" asked Adser, with that indefinite

kind of twinkle in her eye, which was very fascinating to Geoffrey; it was an expression of amused comment.

"Yes, undoubtedly," said Geoffrey.

"I thought being fond of other countries and going out with drums and trumpets and guns to capture them was patriotism. Eh, you should have heard 'em talk of Derbyshire regiment somewhere or other! The foreign soldiers they killed was enough to turn your brain."

"There's no braver troops in th' Queen's army than men o' Derbyshire," said Zodack.

"I knewed that would bring him out," said Adser, laughing.

"You smoke, don't you, Mr. Bradford?" said Geoffrey, opening his cigar case.

"Thank yo, but I smoke a pipe."

"Try a cigar. Come, sit down."

Zodack seated himself beneath a climbing rose-tree near one of the drawing-room windows. Geoffrey gave him a light and then walked about with Adser.

"I can't tell you how happy I am!" said Geoffrey.

Adser did not reply. He could see the blush that passed over her usually pale face.

"Won't you take my arm?" he asked.

She hardly knew how. She had never taken anyone's arm. It was considered a very namby-pamby kind of business in Castleton to be taking arms, but she placed her hand upon the proffered arm, and Geoffrey drew hers within his own comfortably and with an air of rightful possession.

"Do you love me, Adser?" he whispered, bending over her, for, though she was fairly tall, he was still above her height.

"You know I do," she answered, turning hot and cold as she said so—she who had never before been spoken to in soft, insinuating accents—she who had shouted and whistled over the hills—she who had chaffed visitors in the cavern, and had slapped Tregarron's face when he had tried to kiss her—she who had been rude and insolent to her

Uncle Scarthin, and had lived in a continual brawl with her grandmother, "Stingy Blythe." The change was all too strange for her comprehension. It was like a dream with now and then an awakening sting in its blissfulness. Yet Adser had never been unconscious of the admiration she had excited among strangers at church on Sundays, when she put on her best dress with her best manners. It had not yet occurred to Geoffrey, as it had occurred to other visitors, that it was odd to see so handsome a girl, and one so well gowned "and groomed," as Larry Short would say, who spoke with a dialect in a voice that was so musical as Adser's, and might in some respects have been called an educated voice. She had absorbed the free and easy manners of the people, and had laid in with her independent and fearless opinions certain of the vernacular of which the Peak is understood to be proud; but Nature had endowed her with graces of mind and body, the latter apparent to all, the former underlying locally contracted habits and customs of speech that Tregarron, in his poetic way, would have said partially hid the beauties of her mind as the winter débris of the woodlands disguises the violets of Spring.

"I like to hear you say you love me," said Geoffrey after a pause. "Do you know that the first time I saw you, when you came into the museum at the cottage, you gave me a strange sensation that I had never felt before."

"I liked you too," said Adser.

"My dear Adser!" he answered, pressing her arm.

"They are very fine folk in London where you come from?" said Adser, with a little practical turn of the conversation that for the moment fell upon Geoffrey's sentimental raptures like a douche of cold water, but the girl had Zodack's warning words in her mind.

"Not half as fine as some of the people of the Peak," said Geoffrey.

"*I mean in their manners and their talk.*"

"*Oh, I don't know,*" said Geoffrey, puzzled.

"They don't have what Zodack Bradford calls a dialect, do they?"

"Yes, my dear, and a very bad one; a thin, whining kind of dialect compared with the strong noisy speech of the North."

"But the folk *you* know?"

"Oh, they speak like ordinary mortals."

"Like me?" asked Adser, timidly.

"No, my love."

She felt a little shiver run right down into her new boots.

"There is no one in the world that speaks so sweetly as you do."

Then she blushed and grew hot all over.

"Oh," was all she could say.

"What is it you want to ask me, Adser?"

"If you will ever be ashamed of me?" she said, pausing and looking up at him half defiant, half anxious.

"Ashamed of you! Why, what a thought! Who has put it into your dear little head? I am proud of you. My dear child, have I not asked you to be my wife? Have I not told you I love you with all my heart?"

"Oh, yes, and I believe you, and if I didn't, I think it would kill me," she said, hurrying her words all into one sentence; "but Zodack thinks I am not good enough for you."

"Dearest!" exclaimed Geoffrey, "you are too good for any man!"

"Nay, that cannot be," she said with wonder in her eyes.

"What does Zodack Bradford mean?"

"He didn't exactly say I was not good enough, but I think he thought you'd think so; they've a saying in th' Peak that one gets found out."

"They've many strange sayings in the Peak, no doubt," said Geoffrey; "but there's one saying that's universal, Adser, and that is, 'I love you,' and when an honest man says that to the girl he truly loves, and she lays her hand in his with consent in it and cannot keep back her tears, a certain great writer pronounces upon these two, 'They whom God hath joined let no man put asunder.'"

Then he put his arm round her waist, and they walked to the furthest end of the garden without speaking, and Adser laid her head upon Geoffrey's shoulder and wept happy tears.

They were a distinguished looking couple, Adser in her grey serge and her pretty simple bonnet, Geoffrey in a thin brown jacket with a white waistcoat, and a brown deer-stalker hat pushed almost back into his neck, as was his habit of wearing almost every kind of head gear, a loose white silk handkerchief about his neck, and his face aglow with happiness. He looked even taller than he was with Adser by his side, for she gave one an exaggerated idea of her height, she carried herself so well, and with something of an unconscious pride. If she had not been singularly graceful her carriage would have seemed masculine. She walked with a swinging stride, held her head high, and every movement was unrestrained. If Geoffrey Lathkill should really marry this girl of Cavedale, he need have no fear that she would not soon learn to fill her place with credit, if not with distinction.

Zodack sat and watched them, and smoked Geoffrey's cigar, and as it was with Adser there was a feeling of unreality about her presence there and his; somehow he felt very proud, and yet a sensation of anxiety troubled him. To think of this girl being worth ten thousand pounds, with a prospect of thousands more, and being engaged to be married to a friend of the Duke of Devonshire, it staggered him. He felt sorry for Tregarron. There was something emotional in Tregarron's constitution that threatened trouble. Zodack had seen him almost hysterical. Once or twice it had occurred to him that Tregarron was like some of the leaders of the old French Revolution,—a patriot who would go any lengths for what he called his principles. He could not quite reckon Tregarron up. In the days of the lad's boyhood he had taught him to read, and had advised him about the books he should study, but Tregarron as a young *man* had got ahead of Zodack, except in science, and in *this* Zodack was strong, for he had thought much as well

as read much, and the Peak is a good old lonely country both for observation and reflection. Tregarron was somewhat of a pessimist, had read Schopenhauer in the new translations which he got from a bookseller at Buxton. He had taught himself French for the purpose of reading the philosophy of—or want of it—the French Revolution. He and Zodaack could never agree about Alison's History, which was the lapidary's text-book of European story, pronounced by Tregarron one-sided, unfair, the worst kind of Toryism, and so on. Then they differed about the poets. Tregarron preferred Shelley and Keats to Tennyson and Longfellow, who were Zodaack's favourites. They held unanimous opinions about Shakespeare's muse, only that Tregarron insisted that the historical plays were the bitterest satire upon monarchy that had ever been written; and yet with all Tregarron's learning, which it must be admitted was more than common, considering his lack of opportunities of study, the Welshman had done no more than talk and spout, except that he had written something very much like poetry himself, and had the credit as a speaker of doing a great deal to win over the Castleton division to the Radical party.

While Adser and Lathkill were walking on the rose-leaves of his hopeless passion, Tregarron was spinning his yarn in the ropery, walking to and fro and making plans for the future. None of them were very definite. It seemed at the moment as if his plans were mere ropes of sand, compared with the real twine that was running out of his fingers like a trick of juggling. The men and women of the ropery guessed what was the matter. They had all heard about Adser going to the Laurels to sit for her portrait. Not one of them but had noticed with what admiration Lathkill had surveyed her. His man, Perrywick, had as good as remarked at the Duke's Head that the caverns and the Shivering Mountain were not the only attractions in the Peak for his master; and Mrs. Midwinter had told the post-office that her gentleman resident seemed very much taken with Adser Blythe. None of them in the

ropery had a word to say against Adser, but some of the idler folk of the village nodded and winked a good deal, and hoped it wouldn't be another case of the landlord's daughter at the Wheat Sheaf.

The ropery sympathised with Tregarron. Both men and women felt a certain personal pride in the lad who had taught himself to be a scholar, and who could hold his own when discussing the people's rights with the best that came from Buxton and Derby and even London at the election. Besides, he could recite Shakespeare, and at their little celebrations was always ready with a poem made for the occasion. It is true he was not on intimate terms with any of them, lived like a hermit, didn't go to church or chapel, though he had never done a dishonest thing. They allowed that he had a temper and was eccentric; they believed he had foreign blood in his veins, he was so dark, and he loved a bit of coloured ribbon or a showy neckerchief that blew about in the wind; and he took queer fancies to people. It had often been remarked that he would sit for the hour together on Saturday afternoons, when the ropery ceased working, with Mrs. Tidser and Sol's shivery-shaky father. There could be no stranger fancy than this, the more so that he stayed and talked all the same even when Sol came in and went on with his monkey pranks. Tregarron would talk to Mrs. Tidser as if he was sorry for her, and he took an interest in her purchases, and gave her advice about the old books she sometimes bought at auctions. Once, when she went to a sale all the way to Sheffield, Tregarron knocked off work and minded shop for her, and actually gave old Tidser his food. Then he was always kind to children. He would get up in a morning and go bilberrying with the children just as he would when he was a lad, and he would go in the winter to the Wesleyan minister's night school and read Shakespeare and sometimes the Bible to the young men and women. The church wouldn't have him because he never attended divine service there any more than he did at chapel. *Some of the Castleton gossips, especially those*

who were against him in politics, said he was an atheist, but Tregarron had denied the accusation. Anyhow he was what they called a character, and in a friendly sense, though Scarthin Blythe had been heard to call him a scoundrel, and Staley Brentwood had said over and over again that he would come to the gallows.

The women said of him that they didn't know whether he would make a good husband for a bright merry lass like Adser Blythe, but they were sorry for him. They had seen long ago that she was not for him. Everybody knew that except Tregarron, though he had no warrant for thinking otherwise, except such as he found in his most cherished hopes. The women of the ropery, more than any others, knew that Tregarron was madly in love with Adser. None knew better than they how hard he was hit. He showed it in his manner and in his work.

It was well for all concerned that Tregarron could not see Adser and Geoffrey Lathkill walking together arm-in-arm in Mrs. Midwinter's garden.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE SACRED BANNER OF SAINT MADELINE.

"WHAT is it?" Geoffrey asked, as he and Adser both with one impulse paused in their lovers' walk over the Autumn rose leaves.

"Singing," said Adser, listening for a moment, and then looking round for Zodack Bradford.

The lapidary had risen from his seat, holding his half-smoked cigar awkwardly at arm's length, his face turned in the direction of the village. "I don't quite mek it out," he said, replacing the cigar between his lips and walking toward the music, that one moment filled the air, and the next seemed to die away.

"It's like the church choir at Christmas," said Adser; "only it's more beautiful."

"It is coming this way," said Geoffrey.

"Sometimes glee-singers from Sheffield or Manchester come to th' cavern for the day, and sing, 'Hail, smiling Morn,' and such like," said Adser, "but I've never heard aught like this."

"It's a march they are singing. In Germany the troops often sing as they march; but these voices are the sopranos and contraltos of women or boys. Yes, and they are walking to the rhythm of the chorus—a poet would hear the rustle of their silken banners."

"Or their angel wings!" said Adser, almost under her breath.

The earnestness and idealism of the remark coming from Adser sounded for the moment incongruous; but when Geoffrey looked into her face he saw that it was beaming with the eloquence of her thought.

"Why, Adser, my dear, you are a poet!" he said, as he pressed her hand.

"Nay!" she replied, "Tregarron's the poet. I've sometimes wondered in church, when th' choir's sung 'Hark! the Herald Angels sing!' if it was anything like what folks call heavenly"—an explanation that somewhat dashed Geoffrey's delight at the simple capping of his silken banners; but his equanimity was fully restored by the remark that followed.

"And I am so happy," said the girl, "that it was easy to think of heaven."

Geoffrey had already begun to see a new light in Adser's dark blue eyes, and to hear a new music in her voice. There was magic in the change. He did not pause to wonder whether the change was in Adser or in himself. Castleton and the Laurels had undergone a kind of moral transformation during the last hour or two; and the house in Piccadilly had come into his mind more than once. He would go to town and have it done up. It was a new idea—a honeymoon in London.

When he married Adser he would take her home to *Piccadilly*. The sooner the marriage took place the better.

If she was willing, he would make her his wife before the month was over. What did the London season matter to her or to him? He would show her London when Society had left it. It would be a new sensation for him, also, to go about with the people—the country excursionists and Americans—to Westminster Abbey, the Tower, South Kensington, Henley, the Surrey Hills, and later to join the Continental throng and the Winter crowds in search of sunshine and novelty. Geoffrey felt quite youthful and unsophisticated in his desire to introduce the country girl to the great world by happy degrees of pleasant surprises, beginning with London when it is said to be empty, and when the parks are really at their best with their flowers and umbrageous trees, and Richmond and Kew and Windsor and Virginia Water are brave with leafy woods, and the beauty that belongs to the fall of the leaf.

These and other fancies flitted through Geoffrey's brain as he walked and talked with Adser; while she in her turn found herself thinking of how she could best please Geoffrey. She was conscious of checking her dialect, and trying to overcome a tendency to use what, compared with his phrases, were coarse expressions. Such dialect as characterised her speech had been less marked than that of her neighbours, and with her naturally sweet voice her accent had invariably sounded pleasant to strangers. She had a musical ear. This had also kept her dialect free from the harsh intonation that was common in the district. Her love of nature, her passion for flowers, Zodack's introduction to her of good books, and his own fine sentiments, had assisted the cultured impulse of her mind. She was a wild flower that promised to bear transplanting into the noblest floral company. Of late she had been struck with something more than usual in her pronunciation, compared with that of Geoffrey Lathkill, and to which she thought Zodack Bradford, in his quiet kindly way, had intended to refer.

"I mek out that yonder singing must be some choral society," said Zodack, who was re-entering from the house.

He had been outside to reconnoitre. "But I gather that they'n been havin' some kind o' service in th' market-place and are now comin' to th' rope-walk; they'll get there just as men and women's comin' from work."

"They are coming this way," said Adser. "Shall we go and see? There's a laurustinus that'll hide us."

"Why not go to the gate?" said Geoffrey.

"I'd rather not," Adser replied.

"I'll go to th' gate if I may."

"By all means," said Geoffrey, as the sounds of a triumphant march came sweeping up the valley.

"It's what they sing in church," said Adser, "but with the organ and th' choir in surplices. I never heard aught like this!"

"It is beautiful!" said Geoffrey, as the vocal strains came nearer.

Adser, humming the melody for a moment, broke out into a chaunt-like recitation of the hymn, and between her spoken words and the jubilant song of the marching band of singers, Geoffrey was profoundly impressed. Music out of doors had always had a charm for Geoffrey. He was a noted patron of the minstrels on the Grand Canal at Venice, and many a golden piece of his had rewarded the mandolinists and *al fresco* vocalists of Southern France. Adser's remembrances of music in the open air were chiefly made up of the Christmas Waits singing in the snow, while she lay in bed, or crept to her window to peep into the star-lit night. The church choir and the local glee society made the valley ring with their "Hallelujah Chorus" and "Sound the Loud Timbrel" at Christmas time. Adser felt the tuneful rhythm of the music thrill her as she delivered the first verse of the words which the coming evangelists were singing:

"Onward, Christian soldiers,
Marching as to war;
With the cross of Jesus
Going on before;

Christ the royal Master
Leads against the foe,
Forward into battle
See His banners go !”

There was neither drum nor tambourine, nor shrieking cornet, nor strident voice, nor noisy shout to vulgarise the religious sentiment of the words. No thought of the Salvation Army had occurred to Geoffrey, even when Zodack spoke of a service in the market-place. The flutter of silken banners nor the rustle of angels' wings were likely to occur to any one in connection with the organisation of General Booth.

Presently there emerged from the town into Cavedale a white bannerette, with a red cross, held aloft by a woman in white trailing garments, and following her a company of female choristers similarly attired, followed by a group of sisters in blue serge and straw bonnets with silken-lace ribbons, very much after the style of a certain nursing sisterhood of the metropolis. They, too, sang with cheerful voice, but the maidens in white were the leaders, and in their turn were led by the Foundress of the Mission, that same Madeline White who had been Geoffrey Lathkill's first love, if he had ever known what love was before meeting Adser Blythe. The Sisterhood which Madeline had founded called her Saint Madeline, and her banner “The Sacred Banner.” It was a fac-simile of the remains of a flag that had come down to her from her ancestors, one of whom had fought and bled in the old days of the Crusades under Richard Cœur de Lion, with whom he had returned to his own country after many and terrible adventures. Madeline was divinely tall, and in face and figure conspicuous from the rest. The light of a holy fanaticism was in her grey eyes, and she sang as one inspired. Geoffrey looked upon her with amazement, as he stood with Adser watching the strange and unusual scene.

“It is she I told you of” he whispered. “Madeline White, with whom I thought I was in love.”

"Did you? Only think!" asked Adser, answering his whisper. "She is beautiful!—an angel!"

"Too much of an angel," said Geoffrey.

"I am not jealous of her," said Adser.

"Jealousy is a crime where true love is," said Geoffrey, pressing Adser's hand.

"Some people reckon it is a sign of love," said Adser.

"And you have preferred me to that saint?"

"I should have preferred you to any saint or sinner," said Geoffrey. "I fear my dear friend of the Berkshire meadows must be a little mad."

"We always say folk that do curious things in th' Peak are daft; but yonder woman is different; she's heavenly."

The dust of the highway was upon the garments of the Sisterhood. They had marched along the old coaching road from Tideswell, pausing here and there to hold a brief service or to relieve some casual distress. The women in the serge garments were what might have been called the lay sisterhood as compared with the choir. They gave helping hands to those in trouble, assisted them in their housework, nursed the sick, took charge of the lodgings where the evangelists slept at night. Madeline had pressed into their service Mr. Thomas Marshall, a wise, clever, discreet man of middle age who had acted as secretary to her late father. He was not much smitten with the idea of the Mission, but felt it his duty to take care of his master's daughter, first having tried to persuade her from her religious enterprise. He was the agent in advance, the messenger in the wilderness. He carried the purse, engaged rooms for his mistress and her singing and lay maidens, so that wherever they halted for the night they were sure of meat and drink and rest. Sometimes they stayed for a week or two in one place, and became a blessing to many a poor, hard-working wife and widow; but often they started away again early in the morning, shaking the dust of towns or villages from their feet, and marching on with their good tidings of great joy to less perverse and stubborn people.

As the procession swept past the Laurels and defiled

into the narrower way by the Lapidary's cottage, the ropers heard the vocal march, and crowded the cavern entrance to see what it might be. If the sacred banner of Saint Madeline heading the procession of women who sang like angels was a surprise to the ropers, the dark cavern in the limestone cliff, with its picturesque crowd of toilers, and their strange props and standards and twine-clad dresses presented to Madeline and her companions a most impressive scene. It might have been one of the marvellous sights that broke upon Christian in the "Pilgrim's Progress."

The woman who had authority raised her hand as a signal for the last bars of the processional march. The divine song ceased and the women grouped themselves in a semi-circle in front of the cavern, the crowd which had followed them gathering in the pathway above, near the guide's house, within the mighty archway. Tregarron, the Welshman, leaned against one of the great twine-wheels, watching the business.

"Dear friends, sisters, and brethren," said the leader, addressing the ropers in a clear, commanding voice hardly in keeping with her delicate frame and features, "we are a Christian community seeking to do our Master's work. Our mission is to seek the lost sheep and bring them to the fold; to prepare the way of the Lord. We are not beggars; we seek no alms; we have dedicated ourselves and our estates to Christ; we come to you as His handmaidens; we march under the banner of the Great Crusader, but with the battle-axe of the Spirit, the sword of faith, the weapons of comfort and kindness, the songs of love and peace. Hearing that you are masters here in this majestic hall of God, we have come to ask permission to hold a service here to-morrow during the interval of your labour."

Woodruffe turned to Tregarron, and the other masters awaited the conference.

"Madam," said Tregarron, as the mouthpiece of the oldest master "I have to inform you that we have no power to grant your request."

"I am sorry," said the Evangelist.

"And while we do not desire to discourage your kindly endeavours, with all respect we venture to think that you presume upon our poverty in thinking that we need your ministrations, that we are lost sheep, and outside the pale of religion. I should judge you are a lady, and that your sister evangelists are well brought up. Would it not be better to seek the lost sheep among your own class, sinners among the aristocracy, time-servers in high places, usurpers of titles, luxurious bishops, rectors in fat livings, women of fashion whose carriage wheels splash their poorer sisters? We are they of whom Christ said, 'Blessed are the poor, for they shall inherit the kingdom of heaven.' Whether there be any such kingdom or not, we can find our way without the very superior assistance you offer us. Pardon me, look you, if my words are not so court-like and soft as those they use among the rich; we and our predecessors have worked here two hundred years and we are not irreligious, for we call this place God's factory, and we fulfil the divine command of labour, so you see you can teach us nothing."

"And yet," said the Evangelist, "there is the virtue of humility."

"See you practise it, madam," Tregarron replied. "As for us, we are all too very humble, look you, to need any lesson in that quarter."

"There is also the pride that apes humility," answered the Evangelist.

"We can get that knocked out of us by the Salvation Army," said Tregarron. "It goes down to our level. We are common clay. Salvation lasses who smirk and shout and beat tambourines, and smug-faced hypocrites who take Christ by the sleeve, and give familiar nick-names to God himself. That's the sort of mission-work that suits us. We can march to that music, and we understand their red flags and their blood and thunder warnings with brimstone and fire, and a certain hell for every man and woman who does not cry 'Here!' to their bugle call." Tregarron *laughed almost hysterically.*

"Nay, my lad, yo've lost yo'r senses," said one of the women ropers. "Don't shock th' lady; she means well and sings like an angel; don't heed him, mum; he doesna mean all he says."

"Thank you," said Madeline; "I feel sure he does not."

Old Woodruffe laid his hand softly upon Tregarron's shoulder and led him aside; and the Evangelist said, "Dear friends, we will meet you to-morrow; in the meantime join us in singing the Old Hundredth."

She raised her white hand to the choir, and recited the first verse of "Praise God, from whom all blessings flow," in a voice of a sweet yet penetrating quality. The grand old hymn fairly thrilled Tregarron, so that he went to the furthest end of the cavern and sat alone. While he sat there he saw in the reddening opening of the cavern entrance the figures of Adser and Lathkill above the crowd. He could not fail to note the air of possession with which Lathkill treated Adser, nor the willing submission of the girl as she gave her hand to him, and he led her into the midst of the evangelists at the close of the hymn, and introduced her to the woman whom he had addressed so churlishly.

He rose up and went forward towards the crowd. As he did so Adser saw him and met him half-way, while Lathkill continued in conversation with that other woman who had of late been more than once in his thoughts.

"Lewis," said Adser, "don't be angry with me."

"I couldn't if I would," he said, "though I am in the humour to quarrel with my Maker to-night."

"Why?" said Adser, taking his arm, an astonishing thing for her to do.

"I am very unhappy," he said, his heart beating at her touch.

"I hope I am not going to make you more unhappy still," said the girl. "Zodack Bradford has been telling me that you have loved me enough to——"

"Die for you!" said Tregarron.

"But I don't want you to die for me. I want you to live

and be my very best friend, as you always have been, but now more than ever," she said. "You see, I never thought to marry; seemed altogether out of my way. I've always laughed at folks in love; but then, you know, they say marriages are made in heaven, and I suppose heaven sent Geoffrey Lathkill to Castleton, and——"

"I'm listening," said Tregarron, withdrawing his arm from Adser.

"Nay, old friend, don't be unkind to me. I would have loved you as you wished, if I could. Nay, don't turn away. Next to Zodack, I do love you, and if you was in trouble I'd risk my life to save you, and that's as much as you'd do for me."

Adser laid her hand upon his arm and he felt it tremble.

"We don't make our likes and dislikes—there's some people I hate, there's others I love, but there's only one man in the world that a girl can love enough to be his wife——"

"And I'm not that man," said Tregarron.

"No," said Adser, facing him. "God has willed it otherwise."

"I ought to have known it long ago; but I'm a fool, a waif, a stray, a——"

"You're a kind, clever, good fellow," said Adser, interrupting him, "and I want you to forgive Mr. Lathkill if he has hurt your feelings, and to be his friend for my sake."

"Never!" said Tregarron. "If you'd asked me to kill him for your sake, I'd have done it, if I'd swung for it!"

"Is that your answer?"

"My God!" he exclaimed, "I shall go mad. Ask me to-morrow; I'm not fit to be questioned to-night—let me sleep on it." He staggered to the wall of the cavern and hid his face among the wet grasses of the grey limestone.

"No, to-night, Lewis, to-night. By all our childish vows, by our childish troubles, by all the good there is in your heart, be my friend, forgive me. I am sorry I can only be *your friend*, but that I will be till death, Lewis."

She caught at his hand and kissed it. He turned his face to her all wet with tears.

"Adser," he said, "you have broken my heart, but you couldn't help it. I forgive you—tell him I bear him no malice. Good-night. Go now and leave me; if there is a God, I have need of Him. I will kneel to Him here in His ancient house. Good-night."

"May He bless and comfort you," said Adser, who found her heart stirred with new impulses, fresh sensations, an earnestness and sympathy that were hitherto foreign to her nature. There was a time when she would have laughed at Tregarron, called him silly, and left him with an indifferent shrug of her pretty shoulders; but within a few hours all this had changed. Ever since Geoffrey had confessed his love and asked her to be his wife, the world was a different world, her heart was a different heart; she felt softened towards everybody and everything, could have knelt down and even prayed with Tregarron.

"The singing is over," she said, addressing the empty Dale, "and the procession has gone. Was it all a vision?"

"No," said a voice at her side. "You are left, and, thank God, you are no vision."

It was Lathkill who spoke. He had been down the Dale, but finding she was not there, and that Zodack had not seen her, had returned, thinking it possible she might have remained to speak with some one.

"I have been talking to Lewis Tregarron," she said. "He is very sad. I want you and him to be friends."

"If you and he are friends, why, of course he and I will be friends. They tell me he said some harsh things to Miss Madeline White—Saint Madeline, I should say, giving her the full title she enjoys with the sisterhood she has organised."

"He must be forgiven for everything. Do you know that he was very fond of me?"

"No blame to him for that."

"But he told Zodack Bradford he wanted to ask me to be his wife, and——"

"I know," said Lathkill, "and I have put him out."

"No, you haven't; I should never have married him."

"What does he want now?"

"It is not what he wants, it is what I want. I have known him since I knew anybody. When I was an infant he carried me about; we have been companions for years, and I want him to be my friend always."

"And does he refuse?"

"No, not now. I am sorry for him; be good to him for my sake."

"I will," said Geoffrey. "But I am very selfish. I am going to be good to myself, dear little one!" and he bent over the upturned face and kissed it.

"It makes my heart ache to see any one unhappy, now that I am so happy," she said.

"Nobody shall be unhappy that we can make happy, Adser," Geoffrey replied; and Cavedale had never appeared to Adser so beautiful as it was at that moment, nor the Lapidary's cottage so sweet a home.

CHAPTER XIX.

TOO HAPPY TO LAST.

"Now we must say good-night," said Adser, as they paused at the threshold of the cottage.

"Must we?" Geoffrey replied, unwilling to part with his new-found treasure so soon.

"It must be nearly nine o'clock," said Adser. "Early to bed and early to rise is the Blythe motto; you have no idea what time we get up in a morning."

"No," said Geoffrey; "far too soon, I'm sure; and you see I want to go to London to-morrow."

"To London!" said Adser, in a tone of alarm.

"*I have a very nice house in London,*" said Geoffrey.

"That is, it was nice enough at one time; but it is not what I should like it to be—for you, my dear."

"For me!" said Adser.

"Unless you prefer always to live in Castleton."

"Oh no," said Adser.

"When we are married I want to take you home, and home will be—so long as you like it—in Piccadilly, overlooking the Park."

"Yes," said Adser.

"I thought, if we should be married this month, it would be desirable that I should go up and see my servants, and have things put in order."

"Oh!" said Adser, not knowing what else to say.

"I shall only be away for say two or three days at the most."

"Yes," said Adser.

"I would marry you to-morrow, Adser, if I might."

"'Marry in haste and repent at leisure,' Nannie Blythe shouted after me as we left the cottage—me and Zodack—to go to the Laurels only an hour or two back."

"Did she?" said Geoffrey. "What a malicious old person it is!"

"You are right there, though you've no idea how nasty she can be; but I would rather wait a little; you might change your mind—it is all so sudden."

"I shall never change my mind," said Geoffrey. "Perhaps you are thinking that you may change yours, Adser, eh?"

"Nay; you had my heart that first day you came to Cavedale, and you'll have it to th' last, whatever happens."

"My dear Adser," said Geoffrey, taking a quick glance round to see if they were unobserved, and the next moment pressing the girl to his heart.

Geoffrey was not a gusher. He was, indeed, rather reticent of speech when his feelings were very much engaged. Some men who had been his comrades in Africa, and had shared tight places with him, often thought him rather cold in his tributes to courage, and in his expressions of thanks.

for services rendered; but when they knew him they learned to value his one word of thanks far more highly than most men's warmest expressions of gratitude.

"My dear Adser, I couldn't live without you, and I shall feel that every day between now and the day you are really and truly mine is a day wasted."

"I am very happy," said Adser—a confession which Geoffrey did not feel at all monotonous. "Must you go to London?"

"I think so. I have to see my solicitors, you know; and there are no end of things to attend to when a fellow is going to be married, and especially such a non-marrying fellow as I am considered to be."

This interesting conversation was interrupted by Zodack Bradford, who, coming out to smoke his evening pipe by the brook-side, upon which a light dreamy kind of mist was rising, insisted upon changing the scene of his evening's reflections to his own room, in the company of Mr. Lathkill.

"I can give yo a drop of whiskey that's got twenty years on its head," said Zodack, which sounded very prosaic to Adser just then. "And if yo don't like my tobacco, I daresay yo've gotten a cigar."

"Thank you," said Lathkill, looking at Adser, and adding, "May I accept Mr. Bradford's invitation?"

"Nay!" said Bradford, "it's early to ask leave!"

"Perhaps Mr. Lathkill would like some supper?" Adser suggested.

"No, thank you!" said Lathkill, "not after that great high-tea we had! A fine institution, high-tea! We must not forget it when we go to town, eh?"

"No," said Adser.

"Come then, come in, sir," said Zodack, "and I want to show you a newspaper I've been reading to Adser."

"Oh, do you think Mr. Lathkill will care for that, Zodack?"

"Call me Geoffrey!" said Lathkill. "I am to be Mr. *Lathkill no longer.*"

"Not even in company?" said Adser, smiling.

"Not under any circumstances."

"Very well then, come in, Geoffrey," she said, with a coquettish smile. "Mrs. Blythe has gone to bed."

"Thank goodness; she's one who doesn't believe in candle-light!" said Zodack. "She'd be a bit trying to smoke one's evening pipe with."

Zodack prevailed upon Adser to remain with them a little while. She played the hostess for Zodack with an easy gracefulness that held Geoffrey in a pleasant mood of admiring attention. First she took off her bonnet. Then she went to Zodack's cupboard and brought out an old-fashioned earthenware jar. Zodack waited upon her. He placed the jar upon the table. Then she unearthed from some mysterious corner a leaden tobacco-box, a couple of tumblers, and a pair of lovely Blue John ash-holders. Zodack lighted the candle sconces near his lathes and drew down several blinds. Then Adser pushed a chair towards Geoffrey.

"But where will you sit?" he said, looking round for another chair.

"Oh, this is Adser's throne," said Zodack, drawing up the tall arm-chair and placing a cushion for her.

"Thank you," she said with both voice and eyes—and what eyes they were, now that Geoffrey saw them once more in the light, and now that they looked straight into his with fearless admiration and love.

"Now, Mr. Lathkill, mek yo'rself at home. There's th' whiskey and tobacco, and I've lots of pipes, but I see yo prefer a cigar," said Zodack.

Geoffrey had taken a cigar-case from his pocket.

"You don't object to smoke?" he said, addressing Adser.

"Oh no!" she said. "Zodack Bradford always smokes; I think almost everybody does in Castleton."

"Tobacco's the poor man's friend and the rich man's luxury," said Zodack. "I believe, if Adam had lived long enough i' Paradise to find th' plant which th' Divine Maker o' the world undoubtedly set there, he'd never have taken

that apple. Yo see a fellow that smokes isna in a hurry about things ; depend upon it, Adam would have thought it over with a pipe, and we'd have been saved all the moil and trouble his overlooking that one particular plant brought on th' poor suffering old world."

"I don't know about smokers not being in a hurry ; I'm a smoker, and Adser seems to think I'm in a hurry."

"Oh, is that so?" said Zodack, pulling calmly at his pipe and pushing the whiskey jar towards Geoffrey.

"I have known Adser for more than a month, and have been her slave from the first moment I saw her, and now, that I talk of going to town to make a few necessary arrangements for our marriage, she quotes Mrs. Blythe against me, and says, 'Marry in haste and repent at leisure!'"

Adser drew herself into the deepest corner of her great arm-chair and watched Zodack's face.

"Mrs. Blythe said that in no friendly spirit," Zodack remarked ; "but marriage is a very serious step, and it's only an hour or two since yo proposed it, Mr. Lathkill."

"I don't see that time enters into the question. I am old enough to know that I should feel just the same about it a month or two hence as I feel now, and Adser is young enough to trust me ; but, of course, the day rests with her and with you, her friend and adviser. A man who has been all over the world and does not meet the woman he wishes to make his wife until he is five and thirty, is naturally anxious not to enter upon a long engagement."

Adser tucked up her feet above the lower stave of the chair and kept her eyes on Zodack.

"That's so!" said Zodack. "I love Adser so much that I have only one thought about her, and that is for her happiness."

"I am sure of it," said Geoffrey.

"But as her father is expected home, don't yo think he should be consulted?"

"What does Adser say?" Geoffrey asked.

"*I wouldn't consult my father about anything!*" said

Adser, firmly, and Geoffrey thought to himself, "She has a will of her own, this future Mrs. Lathkill!" at the same time reflecting that a woman was not worth a thought who had not.

"That sounds undutiful!" said Zodack.

"Anyhow," said Geoffrey, "I intended to see you, Mr. Bradford, first thing in the morning, to consult with you upon this interesting question. I would like the marriage to take place at any rate before the month is out, if Adser is willing. In that case I shall go to town to-morrow, give instructions for the settlements, and put my bachelor house in order. I have a couple of very good old servants, and——"

"What does Adser say?" said Zodack. "Excuse me for interrupting yo."

Adser, with the thought of her father returning, and perhaps claiming some right to control her, said, "I have given my word to Geoffrey, and I am willing that the rest shall be as he pleases."

"My dear girl!" exclaimed Geoffrey, stretching his arm across the table to take her hand.

"That's the true confidence of a brave, loving woman," said Zodack, "and I think she's right."

Geoffrey pressed her hand. She looked at him with a happy smile.

"Then name the day, Adser," said Geoffrey, "and make this the most wretched and the happiest I have ever known. It began with heavy clouds of doubt and disappointment. It is ending with such warmth of sunshine that I have never felt before, the sunshine of a new life. I wish I could think of some poetic thought to adorn it, but when one would like to say the most one can often only say the least."

Geoffrey delivered this little speech rather haltingly, but the tone of his voice made it seem very eloquent both to Zodack and to Adser. Zodack covered any outward sign of the impression it made upon him by refilling his pipe; and Adser leaned back in her chair and looked at Geoffrey through a mist of tears.

"I will tell you when I say good-night," said Adser; "and I will say good-night now."

She rose, stepped down from her seat, took up her bonnet, and put out her hand to Zodack.

"Good-night, my love," said Zodack, kissing her on both cheeks. "Good-night; God bless yo. I shall be very lonely without yo, but I shall have business now and then i' London when yo live there."

He saw that the tears were in her eyes, which inspired his desire to make light of what at first he was going to treat seriously. "Why, Mr. Lathkill," he said, "there's more than one chap i' Castleton—not to mention a parson I've heard on at Glossop—that pretends they've business i' London about time th' Derby's run. Nay, Adser lass, I shall come up whether th' Derby's run or not; yo'll be my Derby and my Easter Monday, and my Christmas, too, I reckon. Good-night, lass."

"Good-night, Zodack—dear Zodack!" she said, taking the arm Geoffrey offered her, "as if she had been taking arms all her life," Zodack thought, admiringly.

Geoffrey led her to the door and along the passage that communicated with the other rooms of the cottage, and after a little interval of whispers that Zodack did not hear, Geoffrey returned.

"Mr. Bradford," he said, "congratulate me. I am really the happiest fellow you have known for a long time, I fancy."

Zodack took the proffered hand. "I do congratulate yo," said Zodack, "with all my heart. I believe in yo heartily, or, by God, yo should never have had that lass if I could have stood i' the way of it."

"Thank you," said Geoffrey, taking up the cigar he had laid down when he had escorted Adser from the room. "We are to be married on the last Monday in this month at Castleton parish church. I am going to town to-morrow to make my arrangements."

"Very good," said Zodack, lifting his glass, "Here's to yo—and a long and happy life."

Geoffrey clinked his glass against Zodack's, saying, "And I drink to you, Mr. Bradford, as a guest who will always be welcome at Adser Lathkill's home in London, and wherever else she may select to make it."

"Thank yo very much," said Zodack. "If yo'll give me th' address of yo'r solicitors, I'll go up to London myself and meet yo there; yo see, I reckon myself to be Adser's guardian, and her father's given me names of some lawyers i' London who've gotten business i' hand of his, and partly connected wi' Adser, agents of some New York gentleman, th' British consul's friend, who advised him about money paid into Bank of England, and it might be necessary I should hear what they've gotten to say, and at same time give yo some information, since we'n gotten, it seems, to talk about money; you mentioned settlements."

"My dear Mr. Bradford, we'll go to London together. I value this interest you take in Adser, this practical interest. What do you say? Will you be my fellow traveller?"

"Well, I don't mind if I do; yo know the ropes, as they say, much better than I do. Yo see, as I tow'd yo a while ago, Adser is something of a heiress,—her father's settled a matter of ten thousand pounds upon her."

"And I propose to go him ten better, as they say at poker," Geoffrey replied, laughing, "so between us we shall find her plenty of pin money."

"Mr. Lathkill, I'll go to London wi' yo. What time?"

"I propose we catch the Liverpool express that stops at Miller's Dale. I'll wire my people to be ready for us."

"I thought I'd put up at some hotel," said Zodack. "I don't want to trespass on yo'r hospitality."

"Trespass, my dear friend! I shall be delighted to have you as my guest. Indeed, I should feel hurt if you refused."

"Then I won't refuse," said Zodack.

"Very well, that's settled. And now let us talk about the sisterhood in white, and the sacred banner, and poor Mr. Tregarron, and something you were going to tell me

or read to me from a newspaper, unless you want to go to bed."

"I'm in no humour for sleeping," said Zodack, "and I'm anxious yo should know what Jessop Blythe has written to me, and what th' American newspapers have written about him."

There had never before been such a sitting up in Zodack's room as on this night; but as the calm precedes the storm, so were the peace and rest and happy hours of this night in particular the forerunners of undreamt tragedy and woe.

CHAPTER XX.

THE EXILE'S RETURN.

SAINT MADELINE gathered the Sisterhood together at sunrise and shook the dust of Castleton from her feet. It had not tended to maintain the spirituality of her mission to learn from Geoffrey Lathkill his carnal views of life. She had long ceased to sympathise with any other love than that which found its hope and joy in heavenly things. She had laid her white hands upon Adser when Geoffrey introduced her and gave to the blushing girl her sweet and maidenly blessing; but the meeting with Geoffrey had stirred within her no earthly passion either of regret or remembrance. Madeline White was a nun at large, a woman who should have been in a religious house wearing out her life in unnecessary penances and humiliating drudgeries, instead of beating her imaginary wings against a hard and brutal world that only cared for the material relief she brought it. If she could only have laid aside her banner and the impossible motive of her mission—which aimed at the division of the spiritual from the earthly life—and had included conspicuously in her platform the gospel of earthly love, of domestic happiness, of

true friendship, of clean streets, and clean homes, of making the best of the world and carrying out the divine precept of brotherly love, who knows how much real good she might have done? This was Geoffrey's view as he explained it in his common sense way during that midnight sitting with Zodack Bradford. All the same, when Saint Madeline and her choir awakened the echoes of the village street next morning with their hosannahs and their hymns of praise, and afterwards marched forth with the morning sunshine upon them and the red cross of the sacred banner moving forward to the measure of the vocal march, Adser felt as if a company of angels had passed over the village and left something of their higher attributes behind them. She was up early as usual, and hearing the music had gone down towards the village and stood a little way off to listen to the sisters' greetings to the sun. Above their lovely notes of worship and of triumph she heard the sweet voice of Madeline, and her heart seemed to go out after her as the Sisterhood disappeared and the music died away.

It was altogether a strange and embarrassing day for Adser, a day of new emotions, a day of wonder and looking forward. The departure of Geoffrey and Zodack for London troubled her. Geoffrey sat with her for an hour at the Laurels, where the unfinished portrait was turned to the wall. The reality was there. Geoffrey had been too much engaged with that to think any further of the mere picture of it. Adser had attired herself in a spotted blue print frock and white straw hat, with a dark blue ribbon pinned at her throat by a silver brooch that Zodack had given her to match the Bible clasp at her waist. Geoffrey thought he had never seen her look so pretty. She certainly had an artistic eye for dress, he thought, while he on his part certainly had an artistic eye for beauty and an instinct for what was good and sweet and pure in woman; otherwise this village beauty could never have taken possession of his thoughts and influenced all his hopes for the future. Adser tried to explain what she had

felt on the departure of Saint Madeline, and what strange tumultuous emotions had stirred her. She let him understand that she was reluctant for him to go away; but she allowed that it was right since he thought it best. She said she could hardly remember when Zodack Bradford had been out of Cavedale for more than one night. He had no call to go away selling twine once in six months like the ropers. His custom came from visitors or by letters through the post. He did a great deal of writing. His business correspondence was sometimes so great that she had to help him; but now he was to be away for several days. What should she do without both of them?

Geoffrey replied that it gave him great satisfaction to have Zodack go to London with him, because it was not only a proof of the deep interest he took in her welfare, but it showed a man of business, and he intended to make him his trustee in the deeds the lawyers would have to draw up in connection with their marriage. Adser wondered why it was necessary to make all these arrangements. She had never heard of them before in connection with Castleton marriages, though it was true she had never taken any very great interest in them. Geoffrey soothed and comforted her, sat happily with his arm about her waist, and drew for her bright pictures of their future, described Hyde Park and the Row to her, gave her a sketch of Lord's and Goodwood, excited her imagination with scenes from the opera, took her across the channel to Paris and Nice, sailed imaginary yachts for her on sapphire seas, and finished with a view of her home in town and her country nest among the Surrey Hills. It was like a jumble of all the fairy stories and romances she had ever read; but it was nothing to sitting there with her hand in his and his approval of her dress and his deep, heart-spoken assurance that he loved her; having that she could dispense with all the beautiful things he promised her and been content with the humblest cottage in Cavedale.

At last the Castle horses were at the door, with Geoffrey *in the museum* and Zodack fussing with his old-fashioned

portmanteau, and Mrs. Blythe as civilly as she could wishing them a safe journey and safe return—quite a great deal for her in the way of politeness—and Geoffrey took Adser in his arms and kissed her before them all, and she stood at the door when the carriage started for Miller's Dale and waved her hand, and then went into her own little room with its pink and white curtains and flung herself down by the side of her little brass bedstead and sobbed and prayed and prayed and sobbed, until she felt quite calm and resigned, and her heart seemed to be humming the tune of Saint Madeline's morning hymn.

And all this time Adser's father, Jessop Blythe, was steaming along as fast as a Midland express could carry him to Miller's Dale on his way to Castleton. Zodack and Geoffrey passed him on the iron road. He had sailed from New York to the London docks, preferring that route in order to have an interview with the lawyers to whom the British consul in New York had introduced him. Here he had confirmed his settlement on his daughter Adser and made a will. It was only right, he reflected, that he should do this because life was uncertain, and it had only of late been explained to him that if he died intestate his brother Scarthin might be a troublesome factor in regard to the distribution of his property. He studiously excluded Scarthin from his testamentary disposition, but he included Lewis Tregarron for a considerable sum of money; he left a couple of thousand pounds to the Tidsers for their lifetime, to revert to Sol at their death; Zodack Bradford came in for a handsome legacy; old Woodruffe and his family were not forgotten, in spite of his harangue on the day of Jessop's banishment, and lastly came the names of Adser Blythe and his mother, Nancy Blythe.

Jessop had been well informed through letters from Zodack Bradford to New York how affairs stood at Castleton and Cavedale, and when he stepped into a first-class smoking carriage at St. Pancras for Miller's Dale he felt almost happy. If he could have been assured of an affectionate and forgiving welcome from Adser Blythe he would have

been perfectly happy. Apart from this uncertainty, however, he saw himself driving into Castleton with a couple of carriages, one for his luggage, both with two horses; he saw himself once more in the old house where he was born—"after many roving years"—he saw himself feasting the ropers and making them silver presents under the very roof that had witnessed his disgrace; he saw himself driving into Buxton by and by and being pointed at as Jessop Blythe, once a poor roper, now a rich man from America; he saw himself driving to Chatsworth and Haddon and other show places and reviving the memories of his youth under the happiest circumstances, and he tried to imagine his daughter, Adser Blythe, sitting by his side on these excursions. His heart yearned for her companionship, and Zedack Bradford had also fired it with a fatherly pride in her beauty.

The train went pounding along. How strange it all seemed. Everything was so different from America; the handsome stations, the book-stalls, the civil porters, well-dressed men with sporting guns and dogs, ladies with liveried servants looking after their luggage, and then the smooth shining rails, the level meads and presently the hills and dales, all green and hedged, like one continual park; railway banks covered with flowers, way-side stations gleaming with geraniums, roses and sun-flowers; fiery furnaces of iron foundries, glimpses of coal-pits, busy cities, and by and by the flashing rivers of his native county, the white rocks, the deep and sudden tunnels, the clear autumn sky, the calm dropping of the sun, the new moon peeping out shadowy and before its time for shining; a furtive star close by. For miles and miles Jessop did nothing but look out of the carriage windows. The newspapers he had bought lay neglected. Among the smaller luggage he had taken into the carriage was the well-packed case in which he carried his wonderful musical box, and its most familiar tunes were continually running *in his head*—"After Many Roving Years," "Hail, Smiling Morn," and "Home, Sweet Home." As the train ran past

Ambergate and approached Matlock, two men in the carriage, equipped for angling, talked about the weather and the condition of the waters of the Derwent and the Wye, and one mentioned the little Noe that rises in Kinder Scout and flows through Edale and Hope, which Jessop knew so well, and spoke of the best hotel to patronise en route at Castleton; and Jessop felt as if he wanted to say, "God bless you," to them and "Good luck," and shake their hands. Then the train slowed up and stopped at Miller's Dale.

"All change for Buxton," shouted the porters on one side, while those on the other, with a certain impressement of tone and manner, called out, "Liverpool express—take your seats!" The place had considerably changed since Jessop had seen it. The little inn down in the vale had done itself up. There was an ostentatious shed near the station that called itself a "Refreshment Room;" but there was the same odd lot of conveyances in the roadway with touts soliciting passengers for Tideswell and Castleton. Not a soul, however, was there whom Jessop knew, but he was nevertheless pleased to hear himself addressed by his name.

"Are you Mr. Jessop, sir?" asked the station-master, "and is this your telegram?"

"It is," said Jessop.

"The two carriages you ordered are here, sir, and the Job-master will drive you himself, and I'll see to your luggage."

"Thank you, sir," said Jessop, who presently preceded his bags and baggage to the carriages, one specially provided for his heavy trunks, the other for himself and his lighter impedimenta.

No time was lost in starting the traveller on his way. It seemed to Jessop as if every porter and half the inhabitants of Miller's Dale were lending him a hand. What a difference he thought a bit of money makes, and his mind went back to a gloomy day eighteen years back. But it was only a passing thought. It soon gave way to present

happiness and speculations on the future. As the Job-master's pair of hacks jogged along up and down the white broad picturesque road, Jessop felt every now and then a choking sensation in his throat. How well he remembered the lovely country; how touchingly familiar it was; the grassy hills; the valley down below and the river; Miller's Dale, Monsall Dale; the white rocks; the swallows congregating for their migration to serener skies than those which the English autumn threatened; the people along the road, farmers, visitors, excursionists, artists. Presently Tideswell is reached with its fine church called the Cathedral of the Peak, its stony street, and its wayside Inn, where the driver pulls up and Jessop gets out to astonish the bar with an order for ginger beer for himself and whatever the driver likes that is either weaker or stronger. Then on again; more hills and dales, heather here and there, hedges, red with hips and haws, carts and carriages, the latter with tourists, who have been doing the caverns of Castleton; by and by a wayside hostelry where the "stable-man is still a woman" as he remarks to the driver, who orders a little meal and water for his team and is waited upon by a stalwart help in petticoats who guides the noses of the greedy team each into its rightful bucket; then on again until Mam Tor is in sight; and the sun is beginning to set over the wide vale of Hope; and Jessop looks back upon the Gate of the Winds, and all the old memories crowd into his brain. It had not troubled him for years the incident that marked his last experience of the Winnatts; though he had never forgotten to regard Scarthin as a scoundrel; not that the killing of a man was such a serious matter to him now as it was then. He had never dropped his enemy unfairly, but it could not be denied that there was blood upon his hands, but not unmanly shed, not done with traitorous intent, but either in open fight with Indians, face to face, life for life, or in the ring of frontier duelling, or when it suddenly became an enforced question of who shoots first.

And now, as the horses turned their heads into the

straight run down into Castleton, all the old days came back to him, and with the bitter reflection that he had behaved badly to the innocent girl he had married. He knew now well enough that his feeling of jealousy against her had been a piece of weak suspicion, and that when she had refused to justify herself or answer his insane charges, he ought to have taken her to his arms and asked her forgiveness. There was only one consolation for him in this terrible business, that he had never mentioned to a soul why he and his wife had quarrelled; he had not besmirched her fair fame; he had gone out of the way disgraced, a drunkard and a deserter of wife and child. "Oh," he thought, "if a man could only see a little bit of a way into the future! I might then perhaps have sallied out to seek my fortune all the same, but with the good will of my neighbours, and come home again to shower wealth upon my wife and lift my daughter to place and fortune, help my old friends and be a blessing to the whole parish. Anyhow, the girl will be all right; and so will the others; and I'll make all the amends I can."

The sunlight began to give out and a chill breeze came up from the valley; and the driver pulled up at the Castle Hotel.

"No, drive on," said Jessop, "into Cavedale, to the Lapidary's cottage."

The horses were unwilling to go any further. They knew the Duke's Head and Nag's Head and the Castle. They were quite willing to come to a stand at either of these familiar resting-places.

"No, it would never do for me to stop here," said Jessop. "I've come home, and my home's in Cavedale; and, besides, they're expecting me."

"All right, sir," said the driver; "come up, 'osses, you'n gotten to go round t' corner; come up; yo'll have a good feed after that." And so they entered Cavedale, and Jessop's heart beat in a tumultuous kind of way, both with fear and joy. When the carriage stopped, there was his old mother on the door-step, the outer table cleared away.

lights in the house, and a group of men and women standing by.

"Why, mother!" said the white-headed and grey-bearded Jessop, jumping to the ground, "I am glad to see yo!" and he fairly hugged her before she could utter a word; while, hard as she was and bitter about most things, she laid her head upon the returned Prodigal's shoulder and "cried like a child," as everybody said the next day.

"Welcome hoame!" said the second eldest roper, putting out a timid hand.

"Thank you, friend," said Jessop, giving him a hearty grip; and the same greeting and response went on all round.

Then Mrs. Blythe, wiping her eyes on her apron, said, "Come in, Jessop, come in; nay, come in all on yo, there's plenty to eat and drink and a kindly welcome," and the ropers and their friends the lapidaries and their neighbours could hardly believe their eyes or their ears, so cordial and pleasant was "Stingy Blythe."

"We mun help chap in wi' the luggage; there's a lot of it; and there's more to come; it's on the road; it'll be here soon in another trap all by itself," and thereupon everybody lent a hand with the boxes and trunks and other things; and when all was stacked in the museum and the driver paid and fed with a tip for himself that "fairly staggered" him as he told the Castle's ostler, the little crowd of Castletonians and Cavedalers crowded into the spacious kitchen of the Lapidary's cottage. There was a good fire burning; a pot was simmering upon it with such an olla-podrida stew as made every mouth water; and in the oven were several chickens, and on the well-set table a cold ham. A Castle servant hired for the occasion brought out hot potatoes from a little back kitchen which was called the brew house. There were great jugs of ale on the dresser besides two bottles of whiskey; and there had never been seen such a spread in Cavedale before.

"*I don't see Adser,*" said Jessop, in a half-whispered *aside to his mother.*

"No," said the old woman, "I dur say yo will; she isna all she might be; but dunnat bother about her; sit thee down and have some supper; tha mun be hungry after all thousands of miles yo'n been travelling, th' very thowt on it teks one's breath away."

"And where's Zodack Bradford?" he asked, still standing and looking round the room, "and Lewis Tregarron?"

"Here I am," said Tregarron, pushing his way through the others as they were beginning to take their seats at the table. "I only heard this minute that you had come. Welcome, dear old friend, welcome!"

Tregarron showed in his more than usually sunken eyes the mental wear and tear he had lately undergone. His hair straggled about his forehead; he was cleanly shaven, but the bluish tint of his cheeks and chin deepened the sallow tone of his complexion, which was further emphasised by the orange-coloured necktie that he wore with a dark brown velveteen jacket, the sort of garment that game-keepers usually wear with big pockets.

"Why, God bless me, Lewis lad, yo're a man! I left yo a lad; yo'r a grown man. Nay, but I am glad to see yo."

The two shook hands cordially, Jessop fairly wringing the long bony fingers of the Welshman until he almost cracked the young fellow's knuckles. "Nay, I am glad yo're here," went on Jessop; "come this way and sit by me. But dang it, yo donnat look very, well!"

"Too much readin'," said Mrs. Blythe, "and sittin' up a neets; that's what's matter wi' Tregarron."

"I'm very well, thank you," said Tregarron, "and I'm right glad to see you back safe and sound. I've often wished you had taken me with you."

"And I've often had yo in my thoughts, lad," said Jessop.

"Come now," said Mrs. Blythe, "no more talkin'; supper's ready; sit down, Mr. Tregarron."

"Thank you, Mrs. Blythe," said Tregarron, not less impressed than his neighbours with the change in "Stingy Blythe's" manner.

"But, mother," said Jessop, "where's Zodack Bradford? why is'n't Zodack Bradford here?"

"Nay, he's gone to London; yo mun have crossed him on th' way."

"Gone to London!" Jessop exclaimed; "but I tow'd him . I was coming."

"He wouldna get yo'r message afore he left. I suspect this is it; come the same time as th' one yo sent to me." And Mrs. Blythe showed Jessop his telegram to Zodack.

"And what's he gone there for?"

"Nay, donnat ask just now; I'll tell yo a' i' good time; yo mun be content wi' me and neighbours and other old friends for th' present; here's Jabez Black, and Mrs. Dene, and Tom Willox and his daughter Mary, as lost her husband last month; and this is young Woodruffe; we ca' him young, though he looks as owd as his father; and where's Mester Woodruffe, eh, lad? Where's thy fayther?" she asked, addressing a bashful young man of fifty. The bashful young man said "fayther was comin,' he reckoned;" and as he spoke in trotted Woodruffe, hale and hearty, and far more alert than young Woodruffe his son.

"Why, dang it, Jessop," he exclaimed, seizing the hand Jessop thrust out to him, "why yo be changed, that's certain,—a grey head and a white beard,—and a wise head we all knew that, though we did mek free to chop it off as it were; but yo look strong and hearty. Well, well, only to think on it, eh, my lad; it give us a many a heart-ache i' th' ropery when we talked together in winter's nights how w'en had to put yo out; but when news come as yo'd made a fortune, lad, we were just as glad as if we'd gotten it ourselves; eh, but I'm mighty glad to see yo;" and all the time Woodruffe shook Jessop's hand, and Mrs. Blythe made signs for him to leave off and sit down to the table; which Woodruffe finally did without giving Jessop an opportunity to answer him.

"He'd talk till Doomsday, the owd image would, if nobody stopped him," said Mrs. Blythe.

"I'm sorry Zodack isna here," said Jessop.

"It canna be helped," his mother replied.

"And Adser? She isna gone away?"

"Nay, she's somewhere about," said Mrs. Blythe; "yo'll see her soon as she thinks yo shall."

"Yo and her haven't got on well?"

"Why, for th' matter o' that, I didna get on wi' her mother."

"We'll not talk about that just now," said Jessop. He saw that his mother's guests were watching him anxiously. He was evidently casting a shadow upon the scene. This would never do, he thought.

"Now, mother," he said, "come, sit down, and let's begin; I'm hungry, as yo guessed."

"I should think so," said Mrs. Blythe, taking the head of the table, with Jessop on one side of her and old Woodruffe on the other.

This arrangement was deliberate. She had thought to herself, the man that was the mouthpiece of the gang that put him out shall sit down with him, and be compelled to rejoice in his good fortune. She had strong feelings about Jessop. All the love there was in her heart, which was a rather tough arrangement, was concentrated upon Jessop.

"Neighbours and friends," she said, "we'll say grace: May God's blessing rest upon us and give us grateful hearts for these and all His mercies!"

"Amen!" they said one and all, and one and all at the same time wondered at the words of "Stingy Blythe." They did not know that she ever said grace, and they had never heard this one before. Moreover, there was a kind of dignity in the manner and speech of the old woman that struck them as something strange.

"Fall to, lad," she said to Jessop; "memory of old Woodruffe's address to yo last time yo met him should gie a keener edge than even travel to yo'r appetite."

"Nay, Mrs. Blythe," said Woodruffe, "let bygones be bygones; it's all happened for th' best."

"Aye, I knowed yo'd all live to see th' error o' yo'r

ways," said Mrs. Blythe. "What'll yo have, Mester Woodruffe? a bit o' fowl?"

"Thank yo," he said, "and shall I cut th' 'am?"

Yes, he should, and he did with much expedition, and Tregarron poured out the ale; and the supper began with clash of knives and forks and clatter of tongues. The servant from the Castle was helpful in handing round the plates and filling the glasses, and the roper next in age and position to old Woodruffe acted as vice-chairman with the aid of Woodruffe junior, and in no time everybody was eating and drinking, and therefore everybody was happy except perhaps Jessop and Tregarron. They were both thinking of Adser, who, however, was more seriously in Jessop's mind than she was in Tregarron's; for, while Jessop was full of hopes in which she was the leading figure, Tregarron was full of plans, vague though they might be, in which she had no place. He had given her up entirely, and had come to regard her engagement to Lathkill not only with resignation, but with a magnanimous desire for her happiness. On that night of her confession to him and her sisterly appeals, he had knelt down in the further recesses of God's factory and prayed for guidance and good fortune. He knew that he could never be happy; but he prayed that he might be useful in the world; that it might be his lot to make others happy; to advance the best interests of humanity; to do something worthy; to carry the message of enlightenment into dark places. It was by no means an Orthodox prayer; it had no triumphant cross in it. There was none of the Christian fire of Madeline White's mission in it, none of its trust and faith. It was a groping in the dark, but with an acknowledgment of the supreme Power and a craving for help in the right way, concerning which right way Tregarron professed no knowledge and no faith. "Help me," was his cry; "I want to help the world," and he asked also for patience to endure his loss of Adser Blythe and for courage to go through life without her. He got up from his knees *determined to leave Castleton for good, and travel as far as*

sea and land could take him beyond the everlasting hills that had so long hemmed him in. He had saved over a hundred pounds. He had hoarded this in silver and gold, and the next morning he had changed the silver into Bank of England notes at the little local bank that was opened once a week opposite the Castle Hotel. He had sold for a few pounds—almost given away, indeed—his few belongings to Mrs. Tidser. She was to clear them out from his lodgings a day or two after his departure, and nobody was to know of his leaving from her; and nobody from any one except Adser from himself. He knew that he would find Adser soon after five beginning her domestic duties for the day. The return of Jessop Blythe might have been expected to influence Tregarron's decision; but it did not. As he sat at supper with him he felt that this was the last time he should see him, unless by some kind of miracle they should meet again beyond the seas. Unorthodox a Christian as he was, Tregarron had a passing thought of another last supper, the pathos of which had often appealed to him; but the reminiscence of his scripture readings passed out of his mind as quickly as it had entered into it, with the smell of roast and boiled and hot potatoes in his nostrils and the noise and laughter of the company at table.

"I should have thought Sol Tidser would have been here," said Jessop, addressing Tregarron across his mother and Woodruffe; "yo'd thought he'd been wiseacre enough for that, eh?"

"He doesn't know you've come, or he would have been here, I'm sure," Tregarron replied.

"How is the queer little chap?" asked Jessop.

"Oh, just about the same; a little more of a lunatic than he was, less responsible for his actions."

"Oh, but he was always harmless enough," said Jessop.

"Mrs. Blythe says I read too much," said Tregarron; "that is the trouble with Sol; but his literature is of murders dire and bandits, and all the horrors of the penny dreadful twopence colored, and——"

"I know," said Jessop; "but he was always on that game from th' moment he could read owt. I've often thought of the time I last saw him sitting up in the rocks above Styx, and shoutin' to me, and mockin' me with 'After Many Roving Years,' and calling me drunken Blythe; and somehow the look of him has come back to me at lonely moments and dangerous, because yo see he was always honest with me; he knew I was in my way just as much a lunatic as he was, only that he couldn't help it and I could."

"Eh, but he's a devil!" exclaimed Mrs. Blythe, "a malicious thing, wi' more deformity in's mind than in's back."

"Nay, then he's changed very much," said Jessop.

"Not in appearance," said Tregarron, "though he certainly looks more sinister. He's no longer kind to his mother; and of late he's taken to pestering people with a peddler's box, in which he displays any bit of stone or curious thing he can pick up and——"

"I didna want to ca' him a thief," said Mrs. Blythe, "but he's picked up things i' Cavedale that didna belong to him."

"His mother has had to return little matters of curios and books that he has brought home," said Tregarron; "he knows no better; and not long since he committed what would have been a highway robbery in a sane and responsible person for the sake of a gold chain which a young countryman from Tideswell way was wearing——"

"Ay, to see his sweetheart in," said Woodruffe. "I was witness of it, eh; but th' lad's daft; he's gotten some good in him, too. I've knowed him giv money away to beggars, coppers in particular, and once a shilling; I've heard that he's got a mort o' things in a hole i' th' rocks where he sits singing and shoutin' bits o' your owd songs, Jessop."

"Oh, we mun tek care of him," said Jessop, "and gie him things that will please him."

"I'd please him wi' a lunatic asylum," said Mrs. Blythe, "before he gets into mischief as'll force 'im into one. He *show'd his teeth* at me one day, that if I hadna had my stick

ready, as sure as th' fool ca'd me 'Stingy Blythe' and owd witch, that he'd hev jumped at my throat."

"Nay, did he call yo names of that sort?" said Jessop; "but he mun be taught better manners."

"Nay, I wish I *had* jumped at thy throat!" snarled Sol Tidser as he leaned against the door-post of the kitchen. He had been attracted by the unusual flood of light that was poured out upon Cavedale, and, approaching it, was full of wonder at the hubbub of the feast. He had not heard of the exile's return; and now the first words of the man they called Jessop Blythe, his former friend and patron, were for teaching him better manners. "It isn't him," he said to himself, "it isna Jessop; they've killed him out yonder, and this is another. I've read the like," and the crooked mind went back into reminiscences of the criminal literature which was his delight. "Drunken Jessop was a man; this has a white beard like owd Billy Nipper, and 's head's grey; he doesna laugh and he doesna sing." It was a queer impish figure that cast its shadow over the mirthful scene. Quasimodo himself might have been his father instead of that doddering paralytic sitting at home in his chair that responded to his palsy with creaks and shivers. Tregarron was right in saying that Sol was but little changed. His face had few wrinkles and was without a beard; his eyes were still as close together as his stubby nose would permit, and they were sinister and cunning. He had long, powerful arms, and for his height his chest and back (but for a deformity of his left shoulder) might have belonged to a tall and fairly well-proportioned man. His legs were short and crooked as ever, though he managed to get about upon them with a strange and uncanny agility. Presently he withdrew into the darkness of Cavedale and sat upon the wall by the brook where some dozen other persons were lounging all in a row watching the Lapidary's cottage, envying the feasters, talking of the return of the exile and wondering what he was like; for they belonged to a generation that knew not Jessop. Sol Tidser, perched upon the wall, occasionally chuckled in an

unholy kind of way, but he held himself apart from his neighbours. His half-crazy mind was full of impish thoughts and pictures, varied with fitful efforts of memory, in which he saw the Jessop of his boyhood and heard the songs he used to sing.

Then the conversation turned upon the ropery, prices of twine, the masters who had saved money, old Mucklethorpe, the new curate, and the prospects of Castleton generally; and Jessop was informed that the village would have a railway soon; hundreds of men were boring away and tunnelling and turning up the limestone higher up the peak, and Woodruffe said Zodack Bradford had told him that, while he should hate to have the noisy, dirty, snorting steam-engine anywhere near Cavedale, it would be good for trade, and he expected Mrs. Blythe would have to enlarge the Lapidary. Another roper said he understood that Mr. Scarthin Blythe had been buying up most of the property he could get hold of, and, indeed, he had heard that Cavedale, half the way to the cavern and facing the Lapidary's cottage, was already in his hands.

Jessop only said "Indeed" to that, and then suddenly he half rose from his seat. He had seen in the door-way that opened into the next room a face that could be no other, he felt at the moment, than an apparition of his dead wife as he had first seen her, when she was a girl on a visit to Castleton.

As he got up and looked towards it the face disappeared. He turned pale and looked at his mother,

"What is it, lad?" she asked, fearfully.

"My wife when she was a lass," said Jessop, passing his hand across his eyes.

"Nay, it must be Adser," said Mrs. Blythe; "she's like what her mother was. I'll go and fetch her."

The incident disturbed the company. Some of them had not noticed it. Those who had informed those who had not. Then most of them stood up, and all of them silently watched for Mrs. Blythe to come back.

CHAPTER XXI.

JESSOP'S MUSICAL BOX.

WHEN supper was over, and grog was brewed, and pipes were lighted and the door was closed, and the loungers on the outer wall had one by one taken themselves home,—with the exception of the crooked son of the paralytic,—Jessop Blythe was induced to relate some of his adventures. He also showed the company samples of gold and silver quartz, which were passed from hand to hand, with many odd comments upon lead and other minerals of the Peak that were thought to be not altogether unlike the stones from America. Derbyshire men are loath to admit that there is anything anywhere in the world that they cannot match. Then Jessop unbuttoned his jacket and took off his belt.

"There, lads," he said, "that's th' way in which I carried some of my money. At one time I converted what brass I had into diamonds. They were easy to carry, and could always be turned to account. I'd been done by a big bank, yo see, and as I couldna keep money in a stocking, I bought diamonds; and I had them made into buttons, like these that yo see fastened inside this belt."

The men and women craned their necks to see the belt, and the flash of the stones had almost drawn Sol Tidser from his corner in the inglenook where he had crept just before the outer door was closed, crept and watched like one looking on from a distance.

"Nay, yo shall handle the belt in a minute," said Jessop. "I want to show yo some of the money they use out yonder, particularly the twenty-five-dollar gold piece; it's a stunner; yo've got nowt like it in th' Peak."

He unbuckled from the belt two leather pouches, and then passed the belt on to Woodruffe, who passed it on to Tre-

garron, who in his turn passed it to his next neighbour, and it gradually made the circuit of the table. On the under-turn of the belt were fastened six or seven large diamonds, in plain gold settings like large studs. The Cavedalers looked at each other as they handed on the belt; but the precious stones did not make anything like the impression that a handful of twenty-five-dollar pieces made; and these were supplemented by other gold and silver money, including some Mexican coins, both gold and silver, and a few small nuggets.

"I wonder yo was not afeared to go about wi' this stuff on yo," said Woodruffe.

"Nay, I might have been if I hadn't had stuff of this kind about me as well," Jessop replied, pulling out from two back-pockets of his breeches a pair of shining revolvers.

"Dear, dear!" exclaimed Woodruffe.

"Are they loaded?" asked Tregarron.

"Why, yes," said Jessop; "I've had no occasion to use them since I landed."

Belt and coins and nuggets were passed from hand to hand, and everybody admired the exiled roper who had gone to seek his fortune and found it in such abundance; all except Sol Tidser, who despised and hated him. It was a study in madness, the metamorphoses of Sol's disposition and feelings towards his old friend. He could not endure to hear Jessop talk soberly. When he had known Jessop best, the master roper was in his drunken fits and was as crazy as Sol. Now he was masterful and superior. People looked up to him, Old Woodruffe was his great friend. Even the next oldest roper smiled and fawned upon him. Young Woodruffe made much of him. And moreover he was rich. The diamond belt made Sol's eyes flash. His long fingers itched to lay hold upon those great gold pieces. And Jessop no longer drank anything stronger than water. Sol heard him say so. It couldn't be Jessop at all, Sol kept thinking. Jessop was dead with a knife in his heart, like the man in "The Deadwood Mystery," where the other one *got his gold and drank champagne ever afterwards.*

One of the most prized of Jessop's curiosities was the musical box we have heard of from the papers which Zoadack Bradford read to Adser Blythe. It was the invention of the German we have heard of, whom he had met in California, and to whom Jessop had often whistled his favourite tunes, that his musical friend might incorporate them into his invention for Jessop's pleasure. San Francisco does not suggest to the mind the home of musical invention; but a young fellow from the German Rhine was stranded there, and his hobby was musical boxes. It was a hobby he had carried over to America with hopes of opportunities of encouragement, which he had not received in his own country. Jessop Blythe took a fancy to him, and helped him not only financially, but with sympathetic words. The young German, with the assistance of an electrician (who had a special work-shop for the making of delicate tools and other materials required in out-of-the-way manufactures), constructed a musical box with revolving disks that could be changed at will, and upon each of which could be inscribed a musical composition. Furthermore, he had been able to arrange half a dozen disks with an automatic appliance that changed the piece without removing the disks, simply by touching a button, and his great ambition was to eventually improve his machine so that an entire opera could be introduced and played, and replaced by another and another, just as at present he was able to have a repertoire of an unlimited number of melodies and short arrangements. The German was a fine musician as well as a clever and ingenious mechanic. He could play the violin surprisingly well. His fiddle had indeed enabled him to live and work at his automatic boxes until the appearance on the scene of Jessop Blythe rendered the instrument unnecessary except for amusement. After having thrown out hints of what he hoped to achieve in a direction that he knew would delight Jessop, he produced three new disks, and, having buttoned them upon the cylinders, he wound up his box, and it thereupon played "After Many Roving Years." Jessop had almost wept at the sound of the familiar tune, and he

and the German wrung each other's hands when the music changed to "Home, Sweet Home," and then laughed with each other as the second disk was changed and the box discoursed with singular cheerfulness, "Hail, Smiling Morn that Tips the Hills with Gold." Following this came "My Ancestors were Englishmen," and "There is a Happy Land," all of which the German had heard Jessop sing and whistle; and all of which were well known to the company at this feast in the kitchen of the Lapidary's cottage. Jessop bought the box with its special selection of tunes, and had carried it with him ever since, wherever he went; and it often played him to sleep when he was over-tired with anxiety or work.

It took Jessop half an hour at least to tell this story of the musical box, to which those of his friends who were not puffing away at their pipes listened with open mouths.

"I keep it in my bedroom always, no matter where I may be," he said in conclusion; "and I wonder if you'll remember one of its best tunes."

He manipulated one of the disks which he took from a small drawer or case beneath the box, the cylinder of which was already fully wound, pulled out a silver stop, and forthwith was heard the melody of the old song, "After Many Roving Years."

It touched the heart of "Stingy Blythe," who had never been known to put her apron to her eye unless it might be by way of protection against the wind; but there was no mistake about the tears that brought her apron into use on this occasion. Tregarron felt a choking sensation in his throat, and the music drew Adser Blythe a step or two nearer the half-open door where Jessop thought he had seen his wife. On Mrs. Blythe's return he learned that it was his daughter, and that she had fled at the approach of his mother, to return again, however, as we see, more or less fascinated by the thought that there was a man in there who was her father, and whom she had never seen. *She looked into the room, but drew back suddenly. It was the face of Sol Tidser that had startled her. There was on*

it a demoniacal scowl. It was as if the music tortured him. His thin lips twitched. His long bony hands were working. She had heard dogs howl when a street organ began to play in the Market Place. She expected every moment that Sol Tidser would howl; but he only sat and suffered and seemed to utter internal curses.

"I wonder Adser Blythe doant come," said old Woodruffe, who was sitting near Jessop; "she's fond o' music."

"But she isna fond o' me," said Jessop. "Well, I mustna blame her, I've been an unnatural father to her."

"Yo've been nowt at sort," snapped Mrs. Blythe; "nowt at sort: she's a bad 'un?"

"Nay, Mrs. Blythe, she's a lass in ten thousand," said Woodruffe, "and yo mustna talk like that of a young woman who's to be married to a fine gentleman, and one that is friend o' the Duke's."

"She'd better have married in her own station," said Mrs. Blythe.

"Yo're not listening to the music," said Jessop; "I'll change the tune. Perhaps yo've had enough of 'After Many;' suppose we try 'Home, Sweet Home.'"

The musical cylinder slowly revolved. The machine had a regulator. Jessop put it to slow time. The accompaniment to the well-known melody rippled with such a liquid flow that it reminded Tregarron of the gurgle of a Derbyshire brook. He had never quite felt the force of the appeal of the song itself. He had never seen his own home. Much as he had loved Castleton, it was chiefly for Adser's sake. He had always felt more or less of an alien; and yet there was something in this soul-stirring melody of "Home, Sweet Home" that went to his heart. The ropers and their friends sat and listened and smoked their pipes, and "Stingy Blythe" could not keep back her thoughts from travelling back to the days when she was a lass courted by a stalwart young man of the Peak, and she remembered how he brought her to this very home in Cavedale, where she was now listening to the music her son had brought home all the way from America.

Adser Blythe drew nearer the half-open door, where her father had already caught a glimpse of her wistful face, and when she had noted that strange expression of cruel passion in the eyes of Sol Tidser, which had sent her back for a moment into the shadow of the unlighted anteroom. She watched her father when he changed the tune of his wonderful casket. The melody, with its trills and ripples, its accompaniment of triangles and its little interlude of bells that reminded her of the pastoral rhyme Tom Moore had set to the music of "Those Evening Bells" in Dove-dale, filled the atmosphere of the old place. There was no other sound. It seemed as if the company were listening to the music with their hearts as she was with her own. Her eyes rested upon her father's face. She heard him sigh, she saw the tears trickle down his cheeks, and she was fain to lean her head against the door-post and cover her face with her hands.

Then, plaintively above the musical casket, she heard her father say, turning his quivering face towards his mother and the rest:

"I could die happy if my lass would come to me and with her arms round my neck say, 'Father, I forgive you;' and I'd be willing to die this very night if she could add to that 'Father, I love you.'"

But for the song that went on, with every man and woman silently supplying the familiar words, a dead stillness reigned. Jessop's earnest and tender words and the heart longing of them and the sob that burst from him as he leaned back in his chair and buried his face in his handkerchief went home to all present—all but one, and he was not altogether responsible for himself. Sol Tidser, who had in his early days loved Jessop with something of a dog's love, now sat in his corner and scowled at him and hated him; hated him and envied him; hated him for his white beard and his serious voice; hated him the more that the sight of him continually brought before his mind the *rollicking*, drunken Jessop who had chummed with him *and sung his songs* and allowed the dwarf to fool him and

drink his health in mock flagons, and occasionally in real noggins of whiskey; hated him that he did hate him without reason; envied him for his shining belt and the gold pieces it contained. But he said nothing, he only sat and scowled, and no one heeded him, for no one saw more than his crooked legs and his humpy shoulders huddled up as he was in the furthest corner of the settle by the ingle-nook.

The feelings of the company were terribly overwrought. Jessop presently mopped his face and looked up. His mother had not moved from her place. The mental tension of the company was overpowering. Derbyshire folk are most reticent when their feelings are unusually stirred. They are not an emotional people. There is generally a certain stoicism in their grief. Breaking down as he had done, Jessop had therefore much embarrassed his friends. They looked for some relief. Any diversion would have been welcome. It came from an unexpected quarter and in an unexpected way. When they saw the museum door slowly open and Adser Blythe as slowly enter the room, they were glad. There was a general sigh of relief. Something in the girl's manner told them she was coming in the right spirit. Tregarron knew at once that she had heard the heart-broken cry of her father. In her simple grey dress, with its linen collar and cuffs, her hair bound up into a knot and tied with a grey ribbon, she walked across the room with a calm, stately tread, straight to her father's chair, and laid her hand upon Jessop's shoulder. He looked up at her with a bewildered, surprised expression. She knelt down by his side.

"Father," she said, "forgive me as I forgive you."

"Nay, not there," he said, seizing her hands and raising her up, "not there; here in my arms."

He thrust forth two strong yet trembling limbs and drew her to his breast, and could say nothing, but she kissed him and said:

"Father, I love you."

"Fool, beast, waster, want-ropel!" hissed Sol Tidser, and

leaping from his seat rushed from the house and into the night.

Neither Adser nor her father heard Sol's imprecation, nor saw him go out.

"Mad!" said old Woodruffe to Tregarron, who, with one or two others, had noted Sol's strange conduct.

"The moon's at full," remarked the next oldest roper.

"Poor wretch!" said Tregarron; "I'm afraid he grows worse."

But Tregarron and those about him mentally thanked Sol for calling them to their own natural senses, which had been sorely disturbed by the reconciliation of Jessop Blythe and his child.

"Let's leave them," said old Woodruffe, laying down his pipe; "they'll be better by theirsens."

"Yes, no doubt," said Tregarron.

"Friends, come out into the Dale," said the next oldest roper, "or have a look at th' museum for a bit."

Thereupon there was a general movement. Some men drank up their liquor or offered their mugs and glasses to their wives and sweethearts; some laid down their pipes; others walked out with them in full blast. Mrs. Blythe made no remark, but followed the rest, first into the museum, and then into the open air. It was a fine autumn night. The mist on the brook had lifted. The water was running crisply and sparkling in the moonlight. The moon was at full as the next oldest roper had remarked.

CHAPTER XXII.

IN THE MOONLIGHT.

MRS. BLYTHE brought out a chair and sat outside the porchway of the house.

"I am glad they are reconciled, Mrs. Blythe," said Tregarron.

"Th' world's full of surprises," she answered, leaning forward upon her crutch-stick.

"It's a rare neet," said old Woodruffe, leaning against the door-post, "sort of neet that in th' owd days Jessop would ha' been singing 'Meet Me by Moonlight Alone.'"

"Yo're a rare un'," said the next oldest roper; "yo don't look too owd to sing it yo'rself."

"Eh, but I am; I'n got no eye-sight, and my limbs are mortal stiff. I'm younger in Cavedale than when I'm out i' th' world wi' Mester Tregarron, eh, Lewis?"

"I hope I may be as nimble," said Tregarron, "when I am as old."

"Nay, don't trouble," said Mrs. Blythe; "you'll niver mek owd bones."

"Well, I hope not, Mrs. Blythe; I don't want to grow old and peevish."

"No, keep young, Tregarron; you'n gotten such a sharp tongue now, that if it gets owd and sour, it'll mek folks wince, I warrant yo," said "Stingy Blythe," who was now fast recovering from her fit of sentiment nad retrospect.

"Adversity and disappointment give a keen edge to the tongue," Tregarron replied; "but the heart often aches the more when the tongue is sharpest."

"Oh, yo think so, do yo?" said the old woman.

"I know it," said Tregarron, "and so do you."

"Dear me, we know a lot, we do!"

"We know that anyhow, both of us, Mrs. Blythe. I'd often hoped you said nasty things to hide your better nature, or else through pure cussedness," said Tregarron; "and to-night I have learnt that I was right."

"Yo think so? Well, I suppose I owt to be much obliged," said the old woman, evidently pleased in spite of herself.

"You've got nothing bitter to say against that?"

"Nay, I don't want to be carping and nagging at yo, Lewis Tregarron," she said, leaning back comfortably in her chair; "not on a neet such as this, wi' my son at home,

and money enough to mek all on us comfortable for th' remainder of our days."

"Then let us shake hands on it," said Tregarron, putting out his hand.

"Nay, I've no objection," she said.

They shook hands, to the intense amusement of the bystanders, and the next oldest roper said "he hoped nowt would occur to spoil th' harmony of th' evening, for he'd nivver remembered such a happy time, and it made him fairly greet to see that dear lass Adser and Jessop in each other's arms; he'd often said as patience and perseverance was a virtue next to early to bed and early to rise."

"Why, mester," said Jabez Black, who rarely made a remark, "that's th' longest speech I ivver heard thee make, owd man."

"Then just yo lay it to heart," said the next oldest roper.

"Doant yo think we'd better be goin' hoame now, all on us," said young Woodruffe, under the protection of his father, who had egged him on in whispers to make the suggestion.

"And we can come and gie Jessop an early salute i' th' morning," added old Woodruffe.

"I think that's a good idea," said Jabez; "what do yo say, Mrs. Blythe?"

"Nay, doant axe me; yo might hev gone before this, so far as I'm concerned. I doant want to hinder yo."

"I reckon village will be up betimes, anyhow, to welcome th' exile home and to get ready for th' spree we're to hev in the ropery," said young Woodruffe.

"That's as sure as a gun," said Tom Willox, who had become emboldened to talk now that the liquor he had drunk began to tell upon him in the open air, "and bells mun be rung."

"Bells will be rung," said the next oldest roper.

"That's what I mean, bells mun be rung. I'll see about that, if yo like."

"That'll be seen about before this neet's ovver," said *another hitherto silent guest*. "I'll wakken Dick Newbot

up; he's chief ringer; and I'll get th' curate's leave afore he's up, I tell yo. I'll be under his winder by six, and no mistake, and I'll hev' all th' ringers ready beforehand, and I winnat mind gieing 'em a gallon or two of ale mysen."

"Yo always was a patriot," said old Woodruffe, "both yo and your fayther, Jim Newbot, before yo."

"I hope so," said Dick, "and I'll say good-neet, good-neet all. Come, missus, and who else is for Castleton?"

"We're goin'," said several. "Come on, missus," "And now, lass, come thy ways," and other invitations to depart were heard, and the guests gradually disappeared with their "Good-neets" and their "God bless yos" and "Giv' our good wishes to Jessop," and "May the evening's amusements bear the morrow's reflections," and so on, all in kindly, good humour and neighbourly good-will; and Mrs. Blythe sat in her chair and heard their voices die away in the distance. Tregarron stood by and said nothing; he, like the old woman, was busy with his thoughts, and both of them were thinking about Adser Blythe.

"It's a pity Zodack Bradford is not here," said Tregarron.

"Pities go a good ways to mek up life; but I'm glad of one thing,—Jessop's hoame," said the old woman.

"Many a ship that's given up for lost sails into harbour at last," said Tregarron. "I wonder where I shall drift to!"

"Oh, yo'll do," Mrs. Blythe answered; "yo've gotten a stock of knowledge that'll hold yo in th' right way if yo'll only keep a civil tongue and giv' up writin' poetry."

"You think so?"

"I do, though an ounce of luck's worth a hundred-weight o' learning."

"There is no luck for me but bad luck," said Tregarron.

"That says nowt again yo'r merit. Look at our Adser Blythe; she's gotten luck enough for th' whul village."

"And Jessop, he has struck good fortune?" said Tregarron.

"Nay, he's won it; he's takken th' jade Fortune, as yo call her, by th' neck and mestered her; it's been no luck wi' Jessop; he'd gotten th' Blythe pluck; but Adser, she's a

like th' chap that waited with his mouth open while th' ripe fruit dropped into it. A rich fayther and a rich husband, and nowt deservin' of one or th' other."

"Don't say that, Mrs. Blythe, of your grandchild, who is the best young woman that God ever made."

"Oh, yo're still i' that mind, are yo; and they tell me yo'n turned religious, too, sin that white lady wi' her flag fluttered thro' th' village wi' her flock. I never seed such a flighty lot in all my born days; what do they think they're goin' to do, fallalling about th' country by their-sens?"

"I wish you liked Adser Blythe," said Tregarron; "you don't regret that your son loves her?"

"Nay, I doant know; it's natural, I suppose; but that's how he began wi' her mother, and yet she was his ruin."

"You will think better of that before you die, I hope," said Tregarron.

"If it pleases Jessop, I am na goin' to stand in's way; but at same time, I'm too owd to change my opinions."

"But it wrung your heart, his longing for the love of his child," said Tregarron.

"You thowt I hadna gotten a heart to be wrung as you ca' it," said the old woman; "there's a lot of yo'r sort i' Castleton, to judge by th' outside o' things; you'd nivver hev thowt that yonder box o' Jessop's had gotten such music in it."

"I am sure we all of us are unjust to each other in that way," said Tregarron; "but your grand-daughter could be judged by appearances."

"Oh, yes, that's how Jessop judged her mother, but yo never know what a body is till yo'n lived wi' 'em."

"Ah well, Mrs. Blythe, if I have ever said anything or done anything that has hurt your feelings, I hope you will forgive it. Will you shake hands on that?"

"If it'll do yo any good, why, of course, I will; and when I shake hands, I mean it," she said, rising from her chair and taking Tregarron's bony hand in hers. "Aren't yo comin' into th' house again?"

"No, thank you, Mrs. Blythe; I wanted to feel that I had your good-will to-night."

"Nay, yo've gotten it, and I'm glad to mek yo feel yo have, because, while yo were so much tekken up wi' Adser, yo nivver favoured her dislike of her fayther; but come in and say good-neet to them."

"No, thank you, Mrs. Blythe. I would not for the world, look you, disturb their happiness; their reconciliation seems to me a sacred thing."

"I know'd yo'd been getting religion," said the old woman. "Well, I hope yo wonnat mek a cloak on it, nor yet let it mek yo a prey to them that does."

"Thank you, Mrs. Blythe; it's my business in life to shake the trees while others gather the fruit. Good-night."

"Good-neet," said Mrs. Blythe, pulling her chair after her into the house. "He's a bit of a fool, but some fools is cleverer than wise folk." Saying which, she disappeared and locked the door.

She found Jessop and Adser seated together in the ingle-nook. Although the night was warm, the fire was burning with a steady glow that lighted up the faces of the returned exile and his daughter. Jessop was holding Adser's hand. They did not see Mrs. Blythe as she paused at the door, doubtful what to do. Her heart prompted her aright, but her pride and her hard head held her back. Her first impulse was to go straight to the girl and kiss her, something she had not done for ten years; but such a relaxation of her feelings towards the child of the woman whose memory she had hated, would be too sudden for her dignity. Mrs. Blythe had a great opinion of her dignity. She could not, however, help a silent kind of admission that love was a great thing, too, and above all, the love of parents for their children, and the love of children for their parents. Her heart yearned to Jessop. There came into it some of the passion of the love she felt for him when he was a child in her arms, those very arms that were now thin and bony, and the lips with which she kissed him hard and almost unfeminine with the utterance of cruel thoughts and bitter

upbraidings. Somehow she felt that it was a sweet and loving picture that she was looking upon, and that after all this girl with her hand in her father's would soon be taken away from both of them, by a husband who would assert and hold a prior right; and her pride broke down again as it had done more than once already during that eventful night. She went up to Adser and Jessop, and as she did so, Adser rose with something of a frightened look upon her face.

"Nay, I winnat disturb yo," said the grandmother, "yo look so happy. Nay, sit yo down, Adser, but first let me kiss yo, lass, it's long sin' I hev done so." She put her old arms about the girl and kissed her and said, "God bless yo. I am glad yo'r fayther's come, and I'm sorry I havena made his hoame as happy for yo as I might have done."

"My dear grandmother," said Adser, "I did not help you."

"Nay, let's forget it, lass. Kiss me. Have yo tow'd yo'r fayther all about Mr. Lathkill and why Zodaack Bradford's gone to London?"

"Yes," said Adser, still standing.

"Nay, sit down, lass, and tek my hand as well as Jessop's. Have yo been telling him how I'n behaved to yo? I think it must hev been yonder woman wi' the red cross that's stirred up such kind corners as we'n gotten in our hearts, for I'n been talking wi' Tregarron, and he's gotten religion as sure as my name's Nannie Blythe. Well, well! there's no knowin' how things is goin' to turn out i' this world till yo'n drawn th' last number in th' lucky bag; but I'm goin' to bed now. God bless yo both! Eh, Jessop, yo'n done my owd heart good to set eyes on yo again; yo mun be up betimes, there's goin' to be rare doin's in th' morning; bell ringing and crowds a folk comin' to welcome yo, and I doant know what. Good-neet, both on yo."

"I must show you the way to your room," said Adser, as if he did not know the bed-chamber his father had built over an out-house that adjoined the cottage at the back, with its garden of flowers and vegetables, and its stone

wall that bordered old Mucklethorpe's meadow and crept upwards into other meadows that ended among the foothills of the mountainous range of higher lands beyond; but Adser had never seen her father in the old house before, and it was difficult for her to realise that he knew anything about it.

"The stairway's behind the settle," she said, taking up a candle and unlatching a door near the fire-place which disclosed a flight of broad oak steps with a low, stiff, banister. At the head of the stairway there was another door with a narrow landing and a narrow balustrade. She held the candle above her head to show Jessop the way, and he stood and watched her and wondered how he could ever be the father of anything so lovely.

"Won't you come?" she said, turning round and smiling.

"Yes, my dear. Do yo know, I can't help looking at yo and thinking yo must be some good fairy instead of my daughter."

"Let me be both to you," she answered.

"You shall," he said for want of a better reply, and then pausing once more, he said, "There's my box of music; I always carry that to bed wi' me." And he stepped back to take it up.

"Shall I help you?" she asked.

"Nay, I can carry it," he said, lifting it with both hands and following his daughter.

"There," she said, entering the room, "we call this the best bedroom. Grandmother says it was yours when you were a lad, and it's always been kept, I think, ready for you; not that grandmother has said so, but I believe it has been in her mind to keep it for you; scrubbed and cleaned and whitewashed every six months, with fresh curtains put up and the drawers beeswaxed, and the old mirror polished, and everything done as if she was continually expecting a guest."

"Poor old soul, how she must have suffered in her love for me!" he said. "But it's all over now. Good-night once more, dear lass, my Adser," he said, and Adser left

him so happy that he hardly knew whether to laugh or cry; so he did neither, but knelt down by the bed and thanked God.

Meanwhile, Tregarron was sauntering home to finish his packing. As he passed through the village, many lights still twinkled in cottage windows, and there were still one or two groups of villagers standing at their doors and talking of the return of Jessop Blythe and the scene between him and Adser.

The moon shone with a wonderful radiance. The night was singularly peaceful. The spirit of it seemed to enter into Tregarron's soul. If he had not gotten religion in the sense that Mrs. Blythe meant, he had found in his heart both patience and resignation. He was saying good-bye to things as he went along, and looking in imagination beyond the hills.

By midnight, Castleton was abed. Adser in her little pink-curtained room was fast asleep from sheer exhaustion. Mrs. Blythe had gone to bed happy, the first time for many a year. The Woodruffes were dreaming of the bell-ringing, the feasting and holiday-making that the morrow was to bring forth. The younger rope-makers meant to be up early that they might make a long time of the holiday Jessop had undertaken to pay for; so that while he entertained them they should lose no money by it. It was to be such a gay world on the morrow, this little world of Castleton. What a glorious day to-morrow is! How we all look forward to it; what great things it holds in trust for us; what hopes it is to realise! Who is it calls to-morrow a myth, the invention of the evil one, the refuge of the idle, the fool's day for reforming? Rather is it a divine invention, the gracious gift of Hope, one of Imagination's sweetest boons. The misery it may have in store for us cannot destroy the bliss of anticipation which often transcends the very realisation of our dearest hopes. Surely the poet who decries "to-morrow" does not rightly estimate the blessings of "to-day"!

Jessop in the best bedroom set his box to the music his

soul loved best, opened his window and looked out into the night. He had never thought before that Castleton was beautiful. "After many roving years" he found it beyond compare the loveliest country he had seen. It is not necessary to speculate to what extent Adser had coloured the landscape for him. He was ever so long undressing himself. He had put out his candle that he might see the little garden and the long line of hills beyond. He smiled to think what unnecessary things pistols were as he laid a brace of revolvers on a chair near the bed. He thrust his belt underneath his pillow. It was a blissful sensation to get in between the white linen sheets, and to breathe the pure air of the clean room, and to watch God's lamp hanging up in the sky with one or two visible stars for company.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"AFTER MANY ROVING YEARS."

JESSOP dozed and dreamed and woke again, and hardly knew when he dreamed or when he was himself, and the things about him reality or bred of the imagination.

With the changeable character of the English climate that in autumn as in spring, summer and winter both will contest for supremacy in one and the same day, so did the soft and gentle night of Jessop's return home shift to clouds and gusts of wind. God's lamp was blown out. A south-wester rose out of the hill and swept the lower Vale of Hope and rushed on to the stormy gates of the Winnatts.

What seemed most strange to Jessop was that in the last flashes of the moon through the gathering clouds he could see Sol Tidser calmly climb in at the window. Half awake and half asleep he thought the lad had selected this secret hour to bid him welcome or fling himself down by his bed as an act of homage. He had known Sol in the old days lie contentedly under the Wheat Sheaf window

or on the mat by the inner door of the Duke's Head while he sang "After Many Roving Years," or "My Ancestors were Englishmen," or some other familiar song, and hours afterwards follow him home like a faithful dog, expressing his delight in various odd ways and claiming fellowship with him. Indeed, for six months at least, when Jessop had given himself up to drink and idleness, Sol was the only person in the whole village who paid him any friendly attention, and the reader knows upon what curious rollicking terms they parted.

Perhaps the music had attracted him? "Yes," thought Jessop, dreamily, "that's it; he has been watching beneath the window, and has heard the dear old melodies," for Jessop, just before he had begun to feel his eyelids heavy, had got out of bed to wind up his box of tunes afresh, and it was "Home, Sweet Home" that was humming in the air. While he lay smiling and waiting to see what Sol would do, the music changed to the factory madrigal of "Hail, Smiling Morn!" but it fell fitfully upon Jessop's drowsy sense. He was asleep again before he had done conjecturing in an amused and kindly way what Sol was going to do. He had lain many a night under canvas, and had been accustomed to have his comrades pass to and fro in the silent hours. He had slept round camp fires in the open with restless comrades, their feet towards the fire; and it did not strike him as strange that Sol, the softy of the village, the lad who had been his friendly shadow in his youth, should invade his bedroom. It was like the lad, he thought, believing him asleep, not to wake him; so he dozed off, and the music hailed "the smiling morn that tips the hills with gold," and the south-west wind rushed past the cottage to foregather with other winds at the windy gates.

But Jessop was sorely troubled in his sleep. He thought he awoke with a sense of suffocation. He thought he struggled against an iron grip upon his throat. He tried to raise an alarm, but could not. He fought to get free, but there was a weight upon his chest, and he could not breathe. We have all at one time or another had this kind of

dream,—only filling a few seconds of time but seeming to be of endless duration,—to awaken at last with our faculties and our breath restored, and to thank God, may be, that we had only been dreaming.

There passed through Jessop's mind for a moment the wish that he could awake. He felt that if he could only speak all would be well. He tried to call Sol, remembering that he was in the room or beneath his window, but never a sound reached his lips. He made a last effort to get free, and a welcome change crept over him. He was going off to sleep again. He heard the old factory song, the "Hail, Smiling Morn!" and then he dreamt that Adser came into the room, and sat by him, and held his hand, and he said to her, "I don't wish to live, it is too much happiness. I had only one desire in life, your love, your forgiveness. You never thought that a good-for-nowt drunken vagrant could have such a wish. Ah! you say you did, but that's to please me. Eh! but many a time, my lass, I've looked forward to this blessed hour; and it was Zodack Bradford who made me wish it more and more; because he said you were so good and handsome, and all the rest on it." Then he dreamed that Adser said it had lifted a great load from her heart to have his arms about her, and to know that she had a father that loved her; to know that she was no longer unlike other lasses in the village, motherless, and as good as without a father. Nay, she said she almost thought it was worth having suffered all this to be made so happy with his home-coming. Thereupon he folded her in his arms, and she kissed him, and she said that she was sure, if her mother could look down upon them,—as the angelic preacher she had told him about said she could,—she would smile her blessing upon them, and prepare the heavenly way for them when their time should come not to say good-bye, but only to change one world for another more beautiful. And in this dream he breathed again. He was no longer oppressed. The sun seemed to be shining as he had seen it on bright blue mornings in California. Adser said all the village would be gathering to greet him, and

that his mother was happy for the first time, she thought, in her life; Adser had never seen her happy before. Then he said, "Kiss my mother for me, Adser; God bless her and you," whereupon he fell asleep for good, and all the world was still.

* * * * * * *

Adser was up as usual the next morning soon after five o'clock. She hardly remembered when she was not the first to begin the day in the Lapidary's cottage. The south-west wind was sweeping over the land with noise and bustle! The clouds were grey and full of movement. But Adser had sufficient sunshine in her heart to defy the autumn storm. She hummed and whistled soft little tunes as she went down-stairs and began her day's work. She had found a lover and a father all at once. It was almost too much for her peace of mind. It had been, she thought, a strange thing for her to do, to walk into the room and do all and more than her father wished. It must have been Geoffrey who had put soft and tender thoughts into her mind. "I shouldn't wonder," she said to herself, as she drew a great apron around her and began to light the fire, "that I'll be kissing Granny Blythe of my own free will next." She went about her household duties with the lightest heart she had ever had. The fire never burnt up so quickly. The cloth was laid for breakfast, the hearth swept up, the kettle singing on the hob in no time.

She went into the museum and opened the front door. If the wind had not been so high and blustering there would have been rain. The brook was racing along as if it expected floods from the cave, and the clear water wanted to get out of the way of the yellow spume and rush of the expected torrent. As she stood at the door scanning these signs of tempest, Lewis Tregarron, with a travelling bag over his shoulder, held there by a thick hooked stick, turned the bend of the road from Castleton. "Why, where can he be going?" she said, and paused as he tried to take off his cap to her, and his bundle made the action awkward and unsuccessful.

"I was coming to see you," he said.

She answered him with an inquiring little "Oh!"

"Yes, to say good-bye! Can I come in for a minute?"

"Of course you can," she said, leading the way into the kitchen.

"I'm going away, Adser," he said, laying aside his bag.

"Going away?"

"Yes, there's nothing more for me to do here."

"And where are you going?"

"I don't exactly know yet."

"Are you going now?"

"Yes."

"Without saying good-bye to anybody?"

"Only to you."

"But you'll wait till father gets up?"

"No; I'd rather not see him again."

"Why?"

"He might make me change my mind."

"But you were so fond of him?"

"Yes; and he was so good to me. It seems ungrateful, doesn't it?"

"He'll be disappointed!"

"I shouldn't wonder. I'm glad you and your father made it up."

"He seemed so miserable; said he'd be willing to die then and there; seemed as if there was nowt for him to live for but me; he was so womanish and penitent; and it came into my heart to do it."

"It was the right thing. I've got no heart left to do anything with, and I don't want to bother anybody any more; so I'm going where hearts don't count, and——"

"I've behaved wickedly to you, Lewis, I suppose," she said; "it's a pity our feelings will go so contrary."

"Nay, don't say that, Adser. I've always been a poor creature, and I feel that if I was to see your father he'd persuade me to stop here, and what's the good? I know how weak I am, how hard I find it to make up my mind, but the moment that you'd made up your mind about Mr.

Geoffrey Lathkill, I felt it was time for me to make up mine."

"I hope you'll forgive me, Lewis?"

She had generally called him Tregarron before this. There was a touch of sweetness in the use of his Christian name now that bruised his sore heart still more. He felt that she pitied him. He did not know whether to resent this or to give way to the strange emotions it aroused in him.

"I forgive you, Adser, and wish you a happy married life. But I can't stay to see you more of another's than you already are. I've borne it too long already. If it hadn't been for the coming of that fanatic lady with the saint-like face, I would have fled the night I heard of your engagement."

"I'm sorry, Lewis."

"Nay, don't say so; I only want you to know that I love you enough to hope for you everything the world can give you; and I wanted you to feel that I bear no malice against Mr. Lathkill, and that I should like to carry away with me some little token of the dear girl I was brought up with."

"Lewis, my heart is heavy for you, and nobody in the world can ever wish for your success as I shall; as for me, when you get out into the wide world you'll never bother thinking about me as you have done; you'll see somebody else you'll like better.

"Never!" said Tregarron, "never! but that's no matter."

"Here," she said, "take this pendant; Zodack made it for me. It's only a bit o' the Blue John, worth of it's little, wear it on your watch-chain."

She took a pendant cut in the shape of a star from her neck and thrust it into his hand.

"Thank you, thank you, Adser; it shall be my talisman."

"And stay, my father brought a lot of silver boxes, one for each roper; here they are. I'm sure there's one for you."

She unlocked one of the museum cabinets and took from

an American walnut case a silver box. "I shall tell him I gave it to you. I'm sure he will be glad; won't you have it?"

"Yes," he said.

"And I shall tell him you dared not stay because you were afraid he would get you to change your mind."

"Yes, tell him," he said, putting the box into his jacket pocket.

"But are you sure you must go, Lewis? Won't you put it off until to-morrow?"

"No; I've been putting it off for years. It's time I had a mind of my own."

"Will you have some breakfast?" Adser asked him in lieu of any other better thing to say. She could see that he had made up his mind to go, and she felt that perhaps it was the best thing for him to do.

"No, thank you; I shall get some at Chapel."

"Are you going to take th' train?"

"I think not. It's like to be a storm."

"You'll find it hard walking by the Winnatts."

"It'll remind me of some of the tramps we've had together in worse winds than this, and up the Pass, too. Good-bye, Adser?"

"Good-bye, Lewis Tregarron," she said, with a little tremor in her voice.

He took her hand and held it nervously.

"Won't you give me a kiss at parting?" he said.

He took the kiss without any other answer than a slight inclination of her head and hurried away.

She did not follow him, but sat down and looked at the floor. Lying about in the museum were several of her father's packages with various coloured labels upon them, baggage-tickets, hotel cards, railway directions, and steamer labels. Her eyes wandered from these to the familiar things about them that now looked odd and curious. Presently she went into the kitchen. The kettle was singing on its hanger over a ruddy fire. The brass clock in its old oak case was ticking out the minutes in a hoarse voice. It

was nearly six o'clock, about the time for Mrs. Blythe to be stirring. As she began to make the coffee the church bells started to get up a peal. First one bell rung, then a second, then a third, presently a fourth chimed in, and they ranged themselves into line for the entire peal. In a few minutes they were filling the windy atmosphere with music that came and went in gusts, and by the time Adser's coffee-pot was filling the kitchen with its delicious aroma, old Woodruffe arrived. He was immediately followed by several of the youngest ropers' girls and boys. Then came the oldest roper and his wife, and their two grown-up sons. They were all in their best.

"Hope we're not too soon?" said Woodruffe.

"Oh no," said Adser; "though we've not breakfasted yet."

"I tow'd yo we'd be afore our toime," said the next oldest roper.

"Tha did," said his wife; "let's sit i' t' museum till they've had their breakfast."

"Yo'n said it!" commented Woodruffe. "Excuse us, Adser Blythe, but they're ole so set on givin' your fayther first 'Good-morning, Jessop!' yo see, and wind wakkened us ole up I think sooner than regular."

"Will you have some coffee?" asked Adser.

"Nay, we'n ole had breakfast," said the next oldest roper's wife; "we'd rayther sit i' t' museum; besides, th' rest'll be here soon."

And sure enough the rest began to arrive until there was quite a goodly company in the museum and loitering about Cavedale by the time Mrs. Blythe and Adser were ready for breakfast.

"Nay," said Mrs. Blythe, "I'n listened at his door. Lad's fast asleep. I wouldna wakken him; he'll want some sleep after a journey such as he's had. Donnat wakken him, gie him's own toime, there's plenty to eat in th' 'ouse, and I'll make him some breakfast."

"Do you think that's best?" queried Adser.

"I'm sure it is," said Mrs. Blythe; "and doant I know him of owd? He was allers a lie-a-bed."

And so they sat down to breakfast. The crowd of ropers and their wives continued to assemble; and the bells went on ringing; and before breakfast was over and Adser had laid a new cloth and fresh cups and saucers for Jessop Blythe the traveller and rich man, half Castleton was in Cavedale to welcome him back, and to see what he looked like after all these years; and also to spy upon Adser, who was to marry Mr. Geoffrey Lathkill, the gentleman and friend of the Duke; some to note how Lewis Tregarron took things; and whether Mr. Lathkill would be present, and whether he and Tregarron would speak, and to hear what drunken Blythe would say to the waif and stray who had tried to get engaged to his daughter.

Staley Brentwood was not a particularly welcome guest, but he was among the visitors, and he walked into the kitchen with his elderly wife in a dove-coloured silk dress and a bonnet that was the wonder of Cavedale. Staley begged he might be allowed to congratulate Mrs. Blythe, and he had the honour to introduce Mrs. Staley Brentwood. Mrs. Staley bobbed her bonnet at Mrs. Blythe, who bobbed her grey head in return, and said everybody was welcome that day, in a tone of voice, however, that meant plainly enough that the visitors were indebted to the amenities of the time and not to her for their welcome.

Adser asked Mrs. Brentwood to take a seat, and while the highly-bonneted lady complied with her request, she proceeded to remove the breakfast things, leaving, however, a clean and tidy corner of the old and many-legged table nicely set for her father Jessop.

"Father, you see, is having a long rest," she said; "grandmother is not willing to have him wakened."

"And how's Mr. Lathkill?" asked Brentwood, with a sly chuckle.

"Very well, I hope," said Adser, not heeding his mechanical attempt at humour.

"And that person Tregarron, Lewis Tregarron," said

the irrepressible spy of the village, "he was up very early this morning, but I don't see him here."

"Mr. Tregarron's very well too, I hope," said Adser; whereupon Mrs. Blythe, noticing the snigger on Staley's freckled face, said:

"There's no love lost between yo and Tregarron; ivvery-body knows that; but let me tell yo, yo're not th' only one i' Castleton as isna fit to clean his boots."

"You was not always such a friend of his, Mrs. Blythe," said Staley.

"Well, I nivver was a friend of yours, Mr. Poke-your-nose-into-other-people's-business," answered Mrs. Blythe, with a snap of her thin lips and a pattering across the room with her stick.

"Oh, my dear!" said Mrs. Brentwood, rising from her seat, "let us go home."

"Not at all," said Staley Brentwood; "we knows each other, me and Mrs. Blythe; we like our bit of fun."

Emboldened by others who now entered the kitchen, Tom Willox pushed through the crowd in the museum and made his way forward.

"Master's having a good sleep, missus," he said.

"Aye," said Mrs. Blythe; "he'll wakken soon enough; if yo'd been on ships and railways for days and weeks, yo'd be ready to sleep a spell."

"Yo're right, missus," said Jabez Black, somewhat stiff and formal in his Sunday coat, which he had of late years outgrown in breadth, so that his arms stood out at a queer angle instead of swinging at his sides in the way usual to the Black family from generation to generation.

"Why, how do yo do, Mester Mucklethorpe?" said Mrs. Blythe, greeting the shy exploiterer of the great cavern; "nay, I'm reight glad to see yo!"

"Thank yo, Mrs. Blythe," he said, rubbing his hands together with nervous excitement. "I thowt I might come and shake hands wi' Jessop. I was only a young chap when he went away."

"Nay, he was a young chap hissen," said Mrs. Blythe.

"My fayther had th' cavern i' them days, yo know," said Mucklethorpe, who, suddenly seeing Adser emerging from the pantry, now without her great apron and in her pretty grey gown, remarked, "Why, Miss Adser, I was wonderin' where yo'd gotten to."

"How are you, Mr. Mucklethorpe?" said Adser.

"Well as I can be wi'out sight of yo for days and days," said Mucklethorpe; "but it's quite reight as yo should give up guide business; but I will say that cavern's nowt wi'out yo, nowt. It isna worth leightin' candles for, and blue and red fires seem a mockery when one knows as th' human spirit o' the place has gi'n it ole up!"

"Nay, donnat go on i' that way," said Mrs. Blythe; "wonder is, yo ha'not spoiled lass among yo. I donnat know what she'd ha' done if I hadna been here to put th' break on, eh, Adser?"

"No, grandmother," said Adser, turning her happy face to Mrs. Blythe, who patted her head as she spoke, though her head was a trifle out of Mrs. Blythe's easy reach.

"Why, I'm beggared if here isna the curate," remarked Woodruffe junior; and there sure enough that clerical gentlemen walked in with such dignity as was consistent with having to elbow his way, his clerical coat half unbuttoned in the struggle; for Cavedale was crowding into the museum and forcing the friends from the museum into the kitchen.

"I wished—er—to—er—congratulate you—er—Mrs. Blythe," he said, with an Oxford halt and a Cambridge affectation in his mode of speech.

"Thank yo!" said Mrs. Blythe.

"And er—you, Miss Blythe—on—the—er—return of your father," he continued, amidst as much silence as was possible among so many who could not hear what he said, and so many others who wanted to make their way into the kitchen. "I suppose—er—your uncle Scarthin Blythe is hardly—er—acquainted with his brother's return. I am told he is not here—er—and it cannot be the early hour—er—that has kept him away, for I meet him often long before matins riding his—er—spirited horse."

"Let him ride," said Mrs. Blythe. "I reckon Scarthin's rides don't forebode much good to anybody; he's my son, and they say blood's thicker nor water, but he hasna been much of a son to me; and I dare say that Jessop winnat miss his much, thank yo all the same."

"Oh, indeed," said the curate. "I ought to say that I had er—much pleasure in the absence of the Vicar in—er—giving permission for the bells to be rung—er, but I will not intrude any further. My hearty congratulations, Mrs. Blythe—er—and the same to you, Miss Blythe—er and" (this almost in a whisper) "I have to congratulate you on another happy occurrence—er—your engagement to Mr. Lathkill. Indeed, you are both to be congratulated. He is a charming and a most interesting gentleman. I need not say that if the happy event should be celebrated at Castleton—er—as Mr. Zodack Bradford said it would—I met him at the railway station at Miller's Dale—that my poor services and anything the Church—er—can do are at your disposal!"

"Thank you, sir," said Adser, blushing. "You are very good!"

"Not at all, believe me—good-morning. I shall hope to see your father later—good-morning."

The crowd made way for the curate, who was very popular in spite of his mannered affectations of speech, and, indeed, was an excellent fellow, devoted to his work and kind to the poor.

There was a very Babel of tongues inside the house and out. Some of the people found time hang sufficiently heavy on their hands to discuss Tregarron's controversy with the preaching lady; and the general opinion was that she had the best of it; that Tregarron, the Welshman, was a good deal of a heathen, and an atheist to boot. Woodruffe tried to defend him, but he was promptly put down by Staley Brentwood, who hoped there was no man nor woman present who did not believe in a Supreme Being and in the all-saving grace of Christ Jesus our Lord. Thereupon the next oldest roper said he didn't know that this affair was

going to be turned into a prayer-meeting, or he would have gone to work, pay or no pay; and this he insisted upon repeating over and over again, though with every repetition his wife said, "Howd thy tongue, Robert!" Perhaps the repetition was a protest against the assumed authority of his better half. Anyhow, it was his continual answer to every pious remark that fell from the bloodless lips of Staley Brentwood.

The bells rang on and Adser did her best to entertain the numerous visitors. Mrs. Blythe now and then went among them, and had never been known to be so civil. The poor lad was tired out, she said, and no wonder. She couldn't tell them how many miles he had travelled, but it was thousands upon thousands, and they could form some notion of the foreign places he had come from by only looking at his luggage. There it was, most of it,—trunks and portmanteaus and boxes,—and the things that were in them they'd no doubt see all in good time; and it was a sight to see the gold pieces he'd got in his belt, and the diamonds, stones that quite put to the blush all that Derbyshire could do. Mrs. Blythe's description was verified by Woodruffe and the oldest roper, who had seen some of them the night before, not to mention the two sparkling pieces that he had sent through the post to Adser. The crowd outside heard most of this second-hand from those who were fortunate enough to have secured places in the museum and kitchen, and it set on half the men present to begin speculating whether or not they should leave Castleton and try their fortunes beyond the seas. What Jessop Blythe had done they could surely accomplish. Why, he had gone forth a mere drunken nobody, a ne'er-do-weel, an outcast and a wife-deserter, and anything but a promising chap for pioneering and mining, and that kind of work. There were men among them who had won the lead in Derbyshire in the old days and knew all about the business, and who'd think no more of fighting a few Indians than Jessop Blythe had thought of it.

The wind rushed down Cavedale in noisy gusts and the

bells rang out, and old Woodruffe admitted that it was beginnin' to be dry work, when suddenly a shrill, piercing scream was heard above the wind, a scream that cut the very clash of the bells in twain, a scream that sent a thrill through the crowd and froze Adser Blythe where she stood at the bottom of the stairs waiting for her father to come down. Mrs. Blythe had at last decided to awaken him. She had already entered his bedroom and had tarried there for some minutes. Adser concluded that the old woman was talking to her son, and telling him all about the concourse of neighbours and friends who were impatient for him to come down. Adser's face was full of smiles, and Woodruffe stood near her with a happy, expectant expression in his old grey eyes, when that unearthly scream chilled them, and everybody moved with an impulse of horror towards the stairway. Then the cry of terror was repeated, and Mrs. Blythe staggered down-stairs and fell into the arms of Adser.

"Oh, my God!" she gasped, "stop the music! Stop it! My Jessop's murdered in his sleep, strangled to death. It'll kill me! Jessop! Adser! Zodack Bradford! Perhaps I'm demented. Go and waken him. Oh, my God, what's Thou done to us?"

Then the poor distraught woman collapsed in a dead faint. Adser, pale to the lips and trembling in every limb, struggled with her burden and laid it upon the seat in the ingle-nook, where the kettle was singing as defiantly as the bells in the old church were ringing. It was not the bells Mrs. Blythe had referred to when she cried for the music to be stopped; it was the madrigal of Jessop's box, that still went on greeting the morn, and the words, now that the bedroom door was open and she heard the melody, stole, grim and weird, into Adser's memory, "In whose bright presence darkness flies away." Everybody gathered round the fainting woman, casting sidelong glances at the stairway. Adser clutched at the banisters and crept into the room. They found her on her knees by the bed, where Jessop lay dead, the bed-clothes partly torn away from him, his breast

bare, his throat swollen and black, his face calm, his eyes partly closed. Only for the evidence of foul play and the streak or two of blood upon his shirt, he might have been a man comfortably asleep.

Poor Jessop's dream had come true. He had faced perils by sea and land; had met his enemy in the gate and overcome him at mighty odds; had done battle with savages; had risked his life in frontier quarrels beyond the rule of Law or Justice; had fought his way through storm and stress back again to his native village to die on the first night of his return by the hand of an assassin. Such to mortal man seem to be the cruelties of Fate. One can only hope that Jessop's dream assumed at last that happy phase which this record ascribes to it. There is something vastly sad and pathetic, and at the same time dramatically impressive, in the fact that while the breath was being gradually crushed out of him, the musical instrument which had been his solace and companion for years should be strung up to accompany the murderous deed with a blitheful madrigal. Who shall say, however, that the melody may not have robbed death of its sting and led the dying fancy captive with another and a brighter morning than any he had ever dreamed of before?

. CHAPTER XXIV.

ANOTHER RIDE THROUGH THE GATE OF THE WINDS.

"WHY, what's up?" said Scarthin Blythe, reining in his horse to question Staley Brentwood, who, with his face full of importance and a quickening of his tortuous gait, was making his way towards the house of the local magistrate.

"Ain't you heard?" was Staley's answer.

"Heerd? I've heerd nowt," said Scarthin; "I've been away; only come home last neet."

"I see," said Staley, "you look bad."

"How do yo mean bad?"

"Why, as if yo'd been away!"

Even at what he considered to be a supreme moment of his destiny, Staley could not forego the pleasure of letting Scarthin feel that he did not forget how he had once come across him when he was indulging in one of his periodical orgies at Manchester. Staley, when he came to Castleton "to live retired," as the people said, noticed that whenever Scarthin had business beyond the Peak for a week or two, he returned looking yellow and haggard and a trifle more of a demon than usual.

"Oh, shut up," Scarthin replied; "yo think evil of everybody. What's up, I want to know? Summat's up to mek yo look so flurried and so happy, I'll uphowd yo!"

"Yes," said Staley, rubbing his hands; "your brother's come home."

"Oh! he has, has he?" said Scarthin, pulling his horse back from the pavement. "Wi' lots of brass, eh?"

"Lots!" said Staley; "but you'd better go and see for yourself. I'm in a hurry jest now, somethin's hup, as you say, to make me so anxious."

"Why, I met that Welsh fool Tregarron between here and th' Winnatts. I thowt he was a friend o' Jessop's. Seemed to me as if he was off on a journey, 'stead of stoppin' to welcome t' other fool as made a man of him."

"What!" exclaimed Staley. "You met him?"

"Aye, I met him," said Scarthin. "He was sittin on th' roadside talking to a chap for a bit, and then they shook hands and th' Welshman went on. He'd a carpet bag ower his shoulder."

"Had he?" said Staley. "You 'ate him, don't you?"

"Oh, he's a waster; I nivver liked the beggar. He always seemed as if he'd a stone in's his pocket to fling at me!"

"Did you speak to him?"

"No; he got out o' my way, though he seemed to be making for th' Winnatts."

"Could you overtake him?" asked Staley, at the same

time holding up his hand to stop two constables who were walking at double quick time towards Cavedale.

"Could I!" he replied, and then stooping over the neck of his mare he said, "Could we, Jessamy?" and the mare tossed her head as if she answered him, and backed into the middle of the road.

"Look here," said Staley, "one of you go to the cottage, where of course you are bound, and one come with me to the magistrate. I'm a-goin' to apply for a warrant. I know who's done the job, and I don't want to rob the police of the 'onner of taking the criminal."

"All right," said one of the men; "I'll go wi' yo!"

"And I'll go on to th' cottage," said the other. "I've warned th' coroner."

"Why, what the devil's it all about?" asked Scarthin, for men and women were now beginning to hurry to and fro in a state of great excitement. Already the majority of the people were at the scene of the murder, having assembled, as we know, to welcome Jessop home again.

"Summat awful!" exclaimed the constable. "Why donnat yo know?"

"Damn the feller! no, I doant! Something awful! Is that what bells is ringin' for?"

"Bells is ringing for your brother's return, but I've sent word to stop 'em!" said Staley.

"Here, out o' the way; I'll soon know what's up!" said Scarthin, and the next moment Jessamy Rod was whirling round in the direction of Cavedale.

"No, no; not that way! I'll tell you. Stop! Stop!" shouted Staley.

Scarthin Blythe pulled up with difficulty, having once put his mare to the Dale.

"Your brother's slortered, and the murderer has took his diamond belt and money; and Lewis Tregarron's the chap that's done it. Head him off, keep 'im in tow, while me and the horficer get a warrant and come up with yer."

"By God, is that the rumpus?" exclaimed Scarthin,

looking at the constable for confirmation of Staley's startling news.

"That's about it," said the officer; "it's murder from all accounts, but who's the criminal I canna say."

"But I can," said Staley. "I see him leave th' 'ouse soon after five. He was getting over the wall, and I noticed that the bedroom window was open."

"When?" asked the officer. "Was yo at t' back of t' cottage then?"

"No; I noticed that after the crime was discovered, and Mr. Scarthin Blythe has met him runnin' away, don't you hear, with a carpet-bag? What business has he to be runnin' away with a carpet-bag? What business has he to be sneaking out of Lapidary's cottage at daylight, just after the man's murdered, when he should be here to welkim him 'ome!"

"Yo're right,—I see it all!" said Scarthin, his yellow face flushing for a moment. "Damn him, I allus hated him. I'll keep him in tow, never yo fear, and I'll tek him, too. I'll nab him sure as my name's Scarthin Blythe."

"Not till we'n gotten t' warrant," said the officer.

"Oh! damn th' warrant! I'll see what he's gotten in his bag, at any rate. Yo go and get the warrant," said Scarthin, too much excited to keep from public swearing.

Staley and the officer walked over the way to the house of the magistrate, and Scarthin rode up the valley. He concluded that he would first hear something of the facts of the case before starting for the runaway. That was an easy business. He could overtake him if he was a dozen miles ahead of him instead of only two or three.

Tregarron had met one or two people whom he knew, and had sat for a considerable time in a sheltered nook below Mam Tor watching the effect of the south-wester as it tore through the Gate of the Winds. It put something of its own spirit into him. From a feeling of depression had come a sense of elation. He was free as the wind; free to come or go, untrammelled by friend or foe. There was a pain about his heart, but that would wear off. It was but a reminiscence of his parting with Adser. He

would fight it down,—he would see the world. Adser should be a dream to him, a pleasant dream, but only a dream. Everything else should be real. He almost laughed in company with the south-wester that blew the dust of the road up into the clouds like smoke and tore at the stunted trees until their very roots trembled and clung to their stony foundations.

Once or twice he caught the sound of the joyful bells; but it came to him fitfully like a stray memory. Then he bade adieu to reverie and started fairly on his way. Good-bye memory, good-bye Adser, good-bye sloth and dreaming, welcome work and hardship, stormy days and nights and selfish forgetfulness. And yet when he entered the Winnatts Pass and fought his way against the wind that seemed to blow from every quarter of the compass, he could not keep back certain reminiscences of the times he had climbed the cleft in company with Adser Blythe; but the winds soon blew the reminiscences out of his mind; it would have him think of nothing but itself; it howled and screamed, and lifted him on his way, only every now and then to push him back again. He set his teeth and tugged at his bag, and felt as if his first great fight with the world had begun. In this frame of mind he climbed the last tough bit of the Pass and stood above it, with the rocky declivity at his feet stretching away into the Vale of Hope, and the great white road on his left. Riding towards him from amidst the dust he could see a man on horseback, and another in his wake. Tregarron laid down his bag and waited.

"Hi yo, Tregarron! I want yo!" shouted Scarthin Blythe, leaping from his horse.

Jessamy, with the reins flung lightly on her neck, sought the shelter of a ridge of the hill and shook herself as a dog would after a swim.

"I want a word wi' yo, my lad," said Scarthin, who had not noticed the following horse and rider pelting along behind him.

"Well, what is it?" asked Tregarron.

"What ha'n yo gotten i' that bag?"

"What's that to you?"

"It's a good deal to me. What ha'n yo gotten in it?"

"I decline to say, and what right have you to ask?"

"Th' reight o' the law," said Scarthin, putting out his hand to lay hold upon the bag.

"Hands off!" said Tregarron, "or you will regret it."

"Shall I!" said Scarthin, holding his heavy whip-stock threateningly.

Then Tregarron stooped to pick up the bag as if to go on his way.

"Nay, yo donnat stir from here till I'n seen what's in that bag."

"Then I shall never stir from here," said Tregarron, picking it up.

"Oh yes, yo will," said Scarthin, catching a glimpse of a horse galloping on the road, and concluding that Staley or his officer or both were at hand. "Yo'll leave here for Castleton lock-up!"

"What for?"

"Oh, yo know well enough."

"You lie!" said Tregarron; "if any one ought to be there, it's you; but you're too clever to put your neck into a noose."

Although this was a mere phrase to Tregarron, the aphoristic suggestion of the gallows convinced Scarthin of what he had often suspected, that either by letter or in some other way Jessop Blythe had told his *protégé* something about the incident of the Winnatts, in which the absconding clerk from Glossop had come to such terrible grief. The very thought of Tregarron even suspecting what had really happened lashed him into a fury. In a calmer moment he would have seen that the attitude of Tregarron was altogether illogical, considered in the light of Staley Brentwood's information and his relationship with Jessop. But Scarthin's hatred of Tregarron broke down the customary mental and physical control that he exercised over himself in the region of Castleton, where his conduct might be called to account, and where he had

laches of all kinds to hide under an acted philanthropy, and a professed abhorrence of profane language.

"If it comes to swinging, I think it'll be yo'r turn first, yo damned Welsh thief!" said Scarthin. "I tow'd yo long ago I'd gotten to reckon wi' yo, and now's time, yo damned cuckoo; down wi' that bag!"

Tregarron did down with it, but it was only to meet the onslaught of his enemy, who raising his heavy crop rushed upon him and struck him across the face before Tregarron had time to defend himself. The next moment they had gripped each other, and Tregarron showed some fine play both with arms and legs—luckily keeping clear of Scarthin's steel-clipped boots—and had once nearly flung his man with a powerful twist on the hip. Scarthin staggering free from his combatant tried to recover his weapon, but received a stinging blow in the face from his antagonist. He successfully parried a second lunge, however, and once more closed with the Welshman, who was bleeding from a deep cut across his forehead. The sight of the blood excited Tregarron to madness.

"You beast!" he hissed, "curse you," and with the hug of a young Hercules he lifted Scarthin from his feet and flung him with a thud that could have been heard above the wind. Scarthin lay for a moment stunned, but Tregarron could not leave him. The passion of murder was in his eyes. He picked the man up and flung him down again, and would have trampled upon him but for the sudden cry of "Lewis! Lewis!" which caused him to pause, for it seemed like the voice of Adser, and it was so.

Scarthin was not as much hurt as Tregarron might have thought, for, as he turned in response to the cry of Adser, his enemy crept towards him and seized him by the leg, bringing him to the ground. By this time they were near the edge of one of the steepest falls of the Winnatts, close by the spot where the man and horse had gone down in the early days of this history.

The sudden shock of coming down upon his face put Tregarron at a disadvantage, for Scarthin was upon him

and uppermost, but fortunately with a failing grip and somewhat short of breath. After rolling over a time or two, Tregarron struggled to his feet, dragging Scarthin after him. Then with a superhuman effort he caught the master of the Travellers' Rest in his arms and flung him sheer over the cliff, where he fell all of a heap and lay among the rocks half hidden in the tall grass, the wind howling and shouting and hallooing around his broken body.

CHAPTER XXV.

"THE LADY'S PARLOUR."

"LEWIS, you've killed him!" exclaimed Adser. "What's to become of you now?"

"Damn him, I hope I have," said Tregarron in gasps, while he mopped the blood from his face with his handkerchief.

"Come with me, Lewis," said the girl, trembling in every limb and pale to a deadly greyness.

"It was life against life," said Tregarron.

"It was; but you've killed him; they'll hang you."

"Let 'em!" said Tregarron. "God has made life impossible to me."

"Tregarron! Lewis, my dear Lewis," said the girl, "get your wits together. Do you know what they charge you with?"

"No, and I don't care," said the Welshman.

"Do you care for me?"

"Don't torture me!"

"Will you come with me?"

"I must get on my way!"

"You cannot get on your way, you're badly hurt."

"I must bear it."

"If you ever loved me, if you ever cared the least for me,

come wi' me now. Here, let me pin the handkerchief about your poor head."

"What is it? What's the matter besides this?" he asked, while submitting to be bandaged.

"I want a friend! put it that way if you will," said the girl.

"How can you want a friend?"

"Don't talk, come! Not for your own sake, but for mine; for the sake of your good name, for your life!"

"I tell you I don't value my life.

"Do you value mine?"

"To the extent of my own,—my life is yours, take it."

"Come," she said, and picked up his bag. "Dare you ride his horse?"

"Kill the master and ride his horse," said Tregarron, with an ugly grimace; "it is like a deed of Scarthin's. Yes, I dare!"

"Into the saddle. Whisper its name, Jessamy; pat its neck; come along and follow me."

Tregarron was under the spell of the girl. Her will became his. He seized Jessamy's bridle and vaulted into the saddle. He whispered the mare's name, caressed her neck, held her with a firm grip, and turned her head for the road. Jessamy resisted only for a minute or two. She was clever enough to understand that there was a man on her back who would stand no nonsense. Adser had given Tregarron his stick, which had been hooked into the handles of the bag, took the bag herself and hurried to her own horse, which she had tied to a gate in the road. It had been by mere accident that she had overheard Staley Brentwood on leaving the cottage cast suspicion upon Tregarron. Later, when Scarthin had ridden up to the house and blurted out the name of Lewis as the culprit, and how he would ride him down within thirty minutes, she had gone into the Castle stables, got the groom to give her a mount, and rode wildly off to warn Tregarron of the plot against him. But Scarthin had ventured upon a piece of road she would not attempt, and had therefore distanced her

without at the same time knowing that he had a competitor on the way.

Scarthin's mare, which had been cropping the grass during the combat between Tregarron and her master, behaved singularly well. The instinctive devotion of animals to their masters and their instinctive scent for his enemies has many exceptions. It was only the other day that a splendid house dog, being let loose to defend its master against burglars, crouched apart, and let the thieves beat its owner nearly to death. So Jessamy Rod carried Tregarron quite easily, and Adser and the Welshman rode away in company.

"Don't talk; ask no questions till we're safe, and then I will explain," said Adser. "I'll show you the way."

"I am under your orders," said Tregarron.

"You know th' road yonder, skirting Mam Tor and over th' top to Peveril? Well, that's th' point I'm going for, and then you shall know one of my secrets."

"Give me the lead then," said Tregarron, and away she sped. The wind blew her skirts about and made a streamer of her hair. Her hat was tied beneath her chin with ribbon that also made a brave show. The horses sniffed the south-wester and tossed their heads, and ran the race their riders set them. Tregarron had to keep "the pride of the Travellers' Rest" well in hand. Now and then he could not prevent her from leading the Castle horse. Once or twice both animals staggered under the tremendous blows of the wind. Adser leaned forward and Tregarron urged his steed with whispers of her name and wild words without meaning, all the time feeling the smart of his wound, that bled profusely.

At last they were on the further side of Mam Tor, out of possible observation from the road, and then Adser for a minute or two reined in her horse.

"You always knew I'd a secret in th' cavern!" she said.

"Mucklethorpe said you had."

"I had and I have. I'm taking you there. It's a place we can be private in and talk."

Tregarron felt no more smart of his wound. He was lost in wonder. What had happened that she wished to be alone and secret with him? Had some strange news come from London? Had Zodack Bradford found out something to Lathkill's disadvantage?

"When we get this side Peveril, slip out of th' saddle and turn the mare's head homewards; she'll go straight for Travellers' Rest stable. I'll tether mine, for a bit, below th' Castle keep. Are you listening?"

"With all my soul."

"Very well, push on then!"

The two riders once more scoured along the hilly path, the wind still accompanying them, and behind them the sudden rush of an unusual slip of the crumbling earth down the side of Mam Tor, a shivering slide of shale that almost invaded the Buxton road.

In a few minutes Tregarron had slipped from his saddle and turned Jessamy's head towards the Winnatts, and was not surprised to see the mare make her way homewards. Indeed, Tregarron ceased now to be surprised at anything. He was in the hand of his Fate, which he knew to be a relentless one. In spite, however, of his renunciation of Adser and of Castleton, for the moment he experienced a certain exhilaration in the girl's companionship which his Destiny for weal or woe had once more forced upon him. He thought nothing of the peril he might be in from the fatal ending of his fight with Scarthin. He gave himself up to the vicissitudes and the strange haps of the time, finding his patience in the comforting and protecting hand of the woman he loved well enough to have prayed for her happiness even in the keeping of another.

Adser, who had tethered the Castle steed in an out-of-the-way corner by the old fortress, now raised a warning finger, with the remark,—

"Yonder's old Mucklethorpe mushrooming. Keep down!"

Tregarron sheltered himself from the possible sight of Mucklethorpe.

"It's a good thing for you that everybody's busy in Cavedale. Follow me; I'm going to show you th' way the ancient Romans got into th' Peak cavern, th' way nobody's found out since, though all th' learned societies and engineers and antiquarians in th' country have been lookin' for it. Hush! hold back a minute. Now, then, th' mushroomer's gone; drop down into th' hollow of this bit of limestone; that's right! Bend your head, take three steps to th' right; now down on your back, come along."

Tregarron was in a dark hole only a few feet wide or high.

"Let yourself go," said Adser, her voice muffled and coming from a distance.

He let himself go, and shot down a tunnelled slide into an open space.

"Keep still," said Adser, now by his side, "until I light a match."

She lit a match. They were in a small vaulted chamber.

"Now you see that lump of limestone; it's on a swivel. I never could make it out, but it's like th' rocking stones you hear talk of. Pull it round; you see it fills up the entrance. I found it two years ago when I was coming up through th' Victoria Hall; you'd never get th' trick of it without you came on it this side first. Now then it's easy; crawl on your hands and knees to th' right after me; mind your head against the roof, it's stone; now then keep to th' left; now feet first; it's only a bit of a dip, and there you are!"

Tregarron scrambled to his feet. Adser lighted another match and produced a candle, by the light of which Tregarron saw that they were in a narrow passage, at the end of which a heavy curtain was fastened with nails and rings and brackets driven into the interstices of the rock.

Adser drew the curtain. Tregarron entered the room. Adser flung his bag upon the floor.

"I never thought I should have managed this luggage," she said; "but you see I'm used to the way."

"And I did not think of helping you," said Tregarron; "my old selfishness."

"Nay, you shall say nothing against yourself. Castleton's busy enough with your name by this."

She took from the stony walls two sconces and lighted the candles in them, and brought from a small box on the floor another lamp, which she lighted, placing it upon a jutting shelf of rock that was used as a table.

"I call th' place 'My Lady's Parlour,'" she said, "and if ever it's discovered that's going to be its name, and it's just as good a name as the Bell House and Pluto's Hall and the Devil's Cellar. I found it one afternoon when I was egging on some of the learned folk to come higher up in the Victoria Hall, and the minute I found it I was glad they wouldn't come. That's my couch, you see."

She pointed to a corner that was raised from the floor in a flat plane of stone, and upon which she had laid a rug and cushion.

"This is my looking-glass," but, instead of directing his attention to the wall, she stooped over a bowl of water, clear as crystal. It was a natural hollow in a piece of rock into which ran day and night a sparkling thread of water, the bowl continually running over into a crevice that belonged to those regions below, that Mucklethorpe rejoiced to have Adser describe when he had lighted his bluest and his reddest pans of fire.

"Now take your jacket off and wash your face," she said; "it's mighty healing water that; and if you take a candle to it you can see yourself as well as if you'd the best looking-glass in Castleton."

Tregarron took off his jacket and bathed his face. The bowl of crystal water became red.

"I'll bind your head up properly when you've washed. It's a cut just over your right eye; it will be all right. Better a cut than a bruise."

She produced a white handkerchief and bound it over his head, and over the new bandage tied a kerchief from her neck. Tregarron thrilled at her touch. She had never, even in their childhood, been so gentle and so tender with him.

"God bless you, Adser," he said; "you are good to me."

"Now sit down; here's your chair; it's got arms, you see. I often think some of those old Romans must have chiselled them, they look so natural. Wouldn't you think that a mason had worked at making that seat?"

"Nay, there are stranger shapes than that in Poole's Hole at Buxton," said Tregarron; "but with you here I would be ready to swear it's the softest and most comfortable chair in the whole wide world."

"You mustn't go on like that," said Adser. "Now you want something to eat and drink.. Well, I can only give you sweet biscuits and water, but when I leave you for a bit here's some books you can read. I've often come here when Nannie Blythe has been bad to me and read for hours. Here's 'Pilgrim's Progress' and 'Arabian Nights,' and 'Barnaby Rudge' and 'Adam Bede' and 'Peveril of the Peak.'"

"But how long will you be gone?"

"I'm not going yet. Have a biscuit?"

She produced a tin of biscuits of various kinds, and placed a jug beneath the little thread of water, diverting it from its natural basin, and presently handed him a cup of the coolest and most precious liquor he thought he had ever drunk.

"I brought all these things here at odd times, and I've sat here by myself like a queen on her throne, nobody to deny me anything, and glorying in my secret. A house of my own, the lady's parlour, and me the lady; and you're the first in all the world to come into my kingdom, to see the lady of the Secret Parlour."

"Adser, you are a wonder; you amaze me. I don't know what to say to you except something that I must not say, that I——"

"No, you must not say that, and you must not kiss my hand. But do you remember what I said that night? Just this minute it seems to me, and it isn't a week ago, either, that while I couldn't love you as I loved Geoffrey Lathkill, I could give my life to save yours. Didn't I?"

"Something like that," said Tregarron. "It was what I'd said myself, only in what I said there was my love, my heart, my life, my future, my salvation or my damnation."

"Lewis, you must not talk like that. I have something to tell you that will call for other thoughts, and as a sister, as a dear friend, I love you enough to trust your good faith and the honour of your word. Yes, I know it aches. I'll bring you something for it; drink some more water. When I followed you it was to warn you against Scarthin and Staley Brentwood. Hush, don't speak; sit down here and listen to me as quiet as you can. It has taken me all my time to keep my senses. I think God must have given me strength to do it. Hush! I hardly know how to tell you what has happened, and what the charge that devil in human shape, Staley Brentwood, brings against you. I have had no time to weep for the dead, no time, but my heart aches none the less."

"The dead! What dead?" said Tregarron, half rising, but checked by a sudden spasm of pain.

"Promise me to listen with patience; promise me not to get excited. You are almost in a fever now; and no wonder, poor fellow."

"I will be calm, only don't keep me in suspense."

"While you were bidding me good-bye, my father was lying dead in his room," said Adser, leaning against the limestone walls and striving to suppress her emotion.

"Great God!" exclaimed Tregarron.

"While the neighbours were coming in and the bells were ringing and everybody was light-hearted, he was lying there silent, never to waken again, poor fellow! Poor fellow! I thought it would have broken my heart when I saw him."

"Poor Jessop, poor Adser," said Tregarron.

"And I've not tow'd you the worst. Be calm, Lewis; you're weak from loss of blood, remember that; master your feelings."

"Yes, yes," said Tregarron.

"It was bad enough, when he'd just got home safe and rich, and had made up with me, to have to die, but to be

murdered, Lewis!" she said with a shudder, "murdered!"

Lewis leaned back upon the couch with its bit of cushion and cover and groaned aloud.

"I knew how you'd feel it," said Adser.

"Murdered!" gasped Lewis; "what an awful deed!"

Adser filled another cup from the fountain and pressed it to his lips.

"Be brave, Lewis; I have more to tell you, and I must get away for a little while. I want to explain to you why I brought you here."

"Thanks," said Lewis, emptying the cup, "I can bear anything now. Nothing else you can have to tell me can hurt me. Poor Jessop! poor Jessop!"

"Yes, there's more to hurt you; but you have said you are under my orders, and you must continue i' that mind."

"Yes, yes," he said.

"When I followed you it was to warn you that Staley Brentwood and Scarthin Blythe had charged you with the death of your friend, Jessop Blythe, my poor dead father"

"Me!" exclaimed Tregarron.

"You!" said Adser. "Staley Brentwood swears ne saw you climb over the wall soon after the murder, and with malice and money I shouldn't wonder he brings a witness to speak of your getting out of the window."

A grim smile moved Tregarron's lips as he said, "I don't mind that, Adser. Let me go and face the thing at once."

He got upon his feet, but staggered, and had to put out a hand to support himself.

"Yes," said Adser, gently pushing him back upon the couch. "I knew how you'd take it when the time came, but I wanted to warn you what was going on agen you; you mustn't be in a hurry to give yourself up now; you mun wait and see, because after what's happened you've got two charges against you; and one is true, Lewis, one is true! You've killed Scarthin Blythe, the brute; he deserved to be killed!"

"But," said Lewis, once more raising his hand to his head, evidently in great pain.

"Nay, there's no buts," said Adser, laying her hand upon his arm; "you've got to lie quiet till I find out what's going on; and your head aches fit to split, I know it does."

"I can stand it; I'll do whatever you say," he replied with an effort and catching at her hand, which he held while she continued to speak.

"I know what's good for a cut; I know what's good for a fever. I'm going to nurse you, and they might as well go to th' North Pole to find you as look for you in Castleton. I've heard learned gentlemen deliver the most awful wise addresses about there being no outlet to the Great High Peak Cavern, and all the time I knowed that half an hour afterwards I would walk out into th' open if I so minded."

"Adser, I am willing to stop here forever with you as my nurse and companion."

"How you do go on!" she said. "Well, now, are you angry with me?"

"No; I tell you I love you!"

"I tell you you mustn't say so."

"But I will, and the only way to stop me is to give me up to that Staley Brentwood."

"Wait a bit; I'll have him flung out of Castleton if I live," said Adser. "But now I must go. I'll come back wi' some food and just enough brandy to take th' chill off yonder water."

"Let me kiss your hand, Adser," said Tregarron, appealingly.

"Very well," she said, resigning her hand; "it isn't very clean groping among these holes; the cleft I get down by is as soft as th' mud down in Rain's house. Good-bye for the present!"

She stooped beneath a shallow, natural archway and disappeared.

CHAPTER XXVI.

ZODACK AND GEOFFREY LATHKILL IN TOWN AND AFTERWARDS.

ZODACK had a delightful time in London. He had no idea that the great, noisy, dirty place had a lovely side to it. His memory of his only other visit was a confusion of traffic, a hum and buzz and pushing his way through crowds, and losing himself in back streets, and eating strange food in tavern pens, and being utterly worn out at night, and wishing himself well out of it. But under the guidance of Geoffrey Lathkill it was a city of noble streets and parks, of gardens bright with flowers, superb clubs, magnificent shops, and courteous people. His early acquaintance with the great town belonged to that part of it which some years ago was the happy hunting ground of the inexperienced provincial who found his amusement between Charing Cross and the Bank, with an occasional excursion into Holborn. Zodack had heard of the Parks more particularly in connection with labour movements and political demonstrations; but he could hardly believe he was in London when Geoffrey drove him through Hyde Park, showed him the Albert Memorial, paused to pilot him for half an hour into a morning concert at the Albert Hall; and then drove him down to Kew, and gave him a little dinner at Richmond, and smoked a cigar with him on the terrace of the Star and Garter. Geoffrey had done this on the last afternoon of their stay in town. He had telegraphed each day, and written also to Adser recounting some of their movements; but Adser, if she had seen these missives, had never opened them.

Strange that it should be possible for these two dear friends, Geoffrey and Zodack, to be enjoying themselves while such tragic things were going on at Cavedale, with this girl so prominent and pathetic a figure in the midst of it all. For they were indeed enjoying themselves, these two

men. The business in which they were engaged was enjoyment, because it was chiefly in the interest of this girl whom they both loved so tenderly. Zodack had found Geoffrey's position even far stronger and of more social importance than Mr. Lathkill had allowed them to believe, not much less than the seemingly exaggerated account Mr. Perrywick had made it out in his conversations with Mrs. Midwinter, and over an occasional pipe at the Wheat Sheaf. Furthermore, there was something in Geoffrey's manner that captivated the shrewd old man of the Peak. He treated Zodack not only as an equal, but with the full consideration that a gentleman shows to his most honoured guest. Not that Zodack was a man to be ashamed of; though he looked an odd fish at the Reform Club, and the Saturday night coterie at the Garrick smiled at him, and wondered where Lathkill had picked him up. One or two actors confided to Lathkill that Mr. Bradford suggested to them no end of possibilities in the way of make up and character. Zodack wore his brown swallow-tail coat with brass buttons, his flowered waist-coat, and white silk stock, and brown pants that fitted rather close to the leg. His closely-shaven face gave him something of the appearance of an actor, and his well-cut features, his bushy eyebrows and bright beady eyes, together with his silver-grey shaggy air, would have well become such parts as Mathias in "The Bells," or Rip Van Winkle. He was quite at home among the distinguished company, not in the least flurried, and when he was drawn out, related some of his country experiences, and described the difference he saw in London between his second visit and his first. His North country accent and his occasional thees and thous gave piquancy and point to his talk, and there was a calm quaker-like air in his manner that added a novel charm to his individuality, so the club-men felt; and all this was very pleasing to Geoffrey, who confided to several friends that he was going to marry this quaint old gentleman's ward.

The lapidary of Cavedale was very proud of his friend and patron, Geoffrey Lathkill, who it seemed to him had

put on at the clubs something of the grand seigneur for his sake, to give eclat to his comradeship, to carry off, as it were, any awkwardness on his part, to show that he was in nowise ashamed of his companion's want of culture or due regard for the proprieties and customs of Society. When they were alone, he was the Geoffrey of Cavedale; and so he was at the lawyers, where the deed of settlement on Adser was being drawn; so also with Jessop's man of law with whom Zodack had business; and at the great West End shops where he gave extensive orders in connection with the refurnishing and redecoration of his house in Piccadilly. And what a dear, grand, old place it was, this house in Piccadilly! It was appointed in the old style that Zodack knew as belonging to the country houses in Derbyshire; queer old Chippendale and Adam furniture; dark mahogany book-cases, marble stairs, portraits of men in wigs and men in armour, women in hoop-skirts, battle scenes with proud prancing horses and cocked-hatted warriors, soldiers in strange tall head-gear neither helmets nor busbies, and wonderful flower pieces, cabinets of old china, and cases of miniature portraits, and a snuggerly where Geoffrey took Zodack to smoke at night. This was a cozy den of books, and easy chairs, and cigar boxes, and ash-pans of silver and an over-mantle with a painting of Bacchus in the centre. Zodack could not sufficiently wonder at everything he saw, and Geoffrey was just as pleased with Zodack as Zodack was with him; the lapidary was so frank and full of quaint original ideas, and his practical democratic sentiments had a certain smack of Toryism that gave, so Geoffrey thought, strength to his opinions upon economic questions. He knew all about the many efforts that had been made to bring the doctrines of Socialism into practical life; had considered and digested every modern trial at home and in the United States, was up in the history of the Oneida Community, could relate the story of Brook Farm, had the revelations of Hepworth Dixon and Goldwin Smith at his fingers' ends, and the latest failures of Socialistic experiments gathered from pamphlets, newspapers, books, and hearsay; for, as

Adser had told Geoffrey, Zodack had a great deal of correspondence, and received letters from all parts of the world; and the conclusion that Zodack arrived at was that the arrangement of God's factory in the Peak was about the nearest anybody would ever get to Socialism in the practical life of labour: a Socialism that did not cripple freedom; a Socialism that allowed a margin for ambition; a Socialism that gave genius and industry their rightful rewards; a Socialism that sanctioned the elevation of one man over another as regarded authority and social position; and at the same time had definite rules of succession in mastership and direction. The ropers of Cavedale held together and worked in harmony because the conditions under which they lived could not be shaken; they were not at the will of one man or woman; the laws of the community were simple, and the interest of one was the interest of many, and contemplated the well-being of families and workman. The son succeeded to mastership; if not the son, the next workman: it was a kind of Imperial Republic, and it worked as Geoffrey had seen admirably; so well and so firmly that they had been able to make an innovation when the big occasion called for it, and yet without fracture of the structure their forefathers had built for them, and with the strength and permanency of which their successors had grown up. He admitted that there was a certain fascination in the idea of no rent; and he believed that the outcome of the troubles of the present day would be something of a co-operative nature, which would endow the workers with their factories, and make every man as much part proprietor as were these ropers of the Peak, with succession in management to sons and leading workmen.

Geoffrey smoked and listened to Zodack, who hammered out his ideas and the result of his reading with a modest assurance that he was right, or thereabouts, that started Geoffrey into new speculations and views for the political life that many of his friends hoped he would take up when he should marry and settle down; and then Adser would come into his mind and occupy the entire ground, social

and political, and Zodack required very little encouragement to talk about his dear child, as he would often call her, and her many peculiarities of thought, and fancy, and conduct, all of which in Zodack's eyes were virtues of the highest character.

Thus, between business and pleasure and walks and talks and drives here and there, the three days of the London trip came to an end, and on the third day they started for Miller's Dale and Castleton.

Cavedale, out of the way of railways and newspaper reporters, had kept the tragic story of Jessop Blythe's death to herself for four and twenty hours. It was not until Zodack and Geoffrey were on their way that the Manchester evening papers began to print the startling intelligence which stunned the happy travellers at Derby, where the newsboys, under the influence of an unusual excitement, announced an item of the most sensational contents of the latest evening papers, and which they offered to the express passengers with the latest London weeklies and the newest London books, a very mixed collection of fact and fiction. "Double murder at Castleton," said one of Smith & Son's *Mercuries* in a half apologetic way, seeing that it was against the rules to do more than make reasonable mention of the journalistic wares without going into noisy declarations of details that make the London streets hideous with harsh shouts and awful announcements. "Double murder at Castleton, special edition, sir," said the newsboy to Zodack Bradford, while Geoffrey was fascinated by the contents bill of the latest evening paper which had just been posted upon the book-stall and well in the light. "Double murder at Castleton," he read, catching his breath and passing his hand over his eyes to assure himself of the words that stared at him in black and white: "Double Murder at Castleton—Tragic Details—Escape of the Criminal—Affecting Incidents—Strange Story of Miss Blythe, daughter of the murdered man—The alleged murderer kills his captor."

Geoffrey and Zodack were alone in a carriage which

Geoffrey had specially engaged that they might be free to talk of their affairs or read or smoke and be entirely at their ease. All the way to Derby they had been comparing notes as to the future. Geoffrey had sketched out his plans, annotated with frequent reference to the possible views of Adser. Zodack had chuckled over Geoffrey's suggestion that he might start a lapidary's business in town, still having his headquarters in Cavedale; and Zodack had asked him what he thought of his idea of travelling for a spell and seeing the world. He would like nothing better, he said, than to go off on a grand expedition of business and pleasure right round the world. He had a pot of money saved; indeed, he could well afford the trip. Moreover, he should be so main lonely when Adser Blythe was gone from Cavedale that really he had serious thoughts whether a long journey wouldn't be a good thing. He could make it pay, too, he believed, and there was a deal of cleverness in Tregarron. The lad could speak French, and that would be useful when they were through with the British possessions and had to make their way about the continent. Geoffrey remarked that in so far as he could further Zodack's wishes and desires and Tregarron's they might both command him. It was in the midst of the latter part of this conversation that the train drew up at Derby, and the excited newsboy put his head into the carriage with the Manchester evening papers.

Zodack took the papers without a word. "Twopence, please," said the boy, at the same time offering other journals and the newest London weeklies. Geoffrey put sixpence into the boy's hand. "That will do, go away now." The boy went on with his semi-confidential announcement of the startling news from Castleton, and Geoffrey pulled up the window and took from Zodack one of the papers. Zodack was getting out his glasses.

Geoffrey noted the emphatic head-lines of the report to which the newsboy had drawn attention. Then he read a fairly succinct account of the return of Jessop Blythe (realising at the same time the fact that he and Zodack

must have passed him on his way home), the supper given to a few neighbours and friends by his mother, the incident of the musical box, the diamonds and the gold pieces, and the discovery next morning of the dead body. The paper went on to recount how Staley Brentwood had seen a certain Lewis Tregarron, a Welshman engaged at the rope factory, secretly leaving the cottage very early in the morning; how Scarthin Blythe the murdered man's brother had also seen him running away and with a carpet-bag; that, moved by these and other suspicious circumstances, a warrant had been issued for Tregarron's arrest, with which knowledge Mr. Scarthin Blythe had ridden off to keep the alleged miscreant in view until the police could secure him; how Mr. Blythe came up with his man, and how, in a scuffle that ensued, Tregarron flung him over a cliff into the Winnatts and killed him. Then the report went on to say that no sooner had Mr. Scarthin Blythe ridden off to intercept the flight of Tregarron than the murdered man's daughter, Adser Blythe, followed, taking a horse for that purpose from the stables of the Castle Hotel. What transpired after this remained somewhat in doubt unless Miss Blythe's statement could be entirely accepted, but as Tregarron had been her sweetheart her word remained in question. She says it is not true that Tregarron left the cottage secretly. He called to bid her good-bye, intending to leave Castleton for good. When she overheard Scarthin Blythe say that Tregarron was to be arrested for the murder of her father, and boast that he would overtake him and lock him up, it came to her to warn him. He had always been unfortunate, and it seemed to her to be such a terrible conspiracy on the part of Scarthin Blythe and Staley Brentwood, that she felt it to be her duty to warn him. She did not reach him in time to prevent the meeting between him and Scarthin; she saw the fight from a distance; she saw Scarthin attack him with his whip; she saw Tregarron close with him; she saw Scarthin try to push him nearer the cliff at every encounter; and she got up to them just in time to witness the last struggle in which Tregarron shook him-

self free of Scarthin and flung him; unfortunately, they were on the edge of the precipice. It was quite true that she induced Tregarron to go into hiding; it was quite true that she knew where he was. He was badly wounded. She did not tell him that he was charged with murder, nor did Scarthin Blythe. Blythe only called him a thief and a scoundrel and other hard names. She did not tell him the charge against him, because she knew that if she had done so he would have insisted upon giving himself up, and she was determined, if possible, to save him from the humiliation and indignity of a prison. She was sure the mystery would be cleared; she was sure that Tregarron was utterly innocent; but she felt that it was wise for him to keep out of the way for a time on account of the unfortunate death of Scarthin Blythe, that is if he was dead; she had heard he was not. Cautioned that she might be incriminating herself, she said that did not matter; the truth was the truth, and if she had to suffer for it she could not help it; she was alone, as it happened, without the advice of her dear old friend and guardian, Zodack Bradfôrd, and without the counsel of one still dearer to her, but she would act upon the dictates of her heart and be guided by the truth, and take the consequences. The neighbourhood is being scoured with a view to the capture of Tregarron, and the police hold Miss Blythe under surveillance; it is thought that she will be arrested. Asked about her father, she said, with the tears in her eyes, that she had had no time to sorrow for him, though she felt his death keenly, having only been reconciled to him the night before his death, and that she had, in her brief knowledge of him, come to the conclusions that he was a brave, honest, good man, who had been deceived and misrepresented, and whose memory she should cherish. Her grandmother, Mrs. Blythe, has not spoken since she went into her son's room and found him dead, while the musical box which he brought home from America was playing one of his favourite tunes, "Hail, Smiling Morn!" "The whole story," concluded the report, "is one of the most tragic, and in some respects the most

pathetic, in the criminal history of the North." Then there was in heavy leaded type a paragraph of "Later News," in which it was stated that Scarthin Blythe was not dead, and that the local magistrate and the inspector of police for the district had gone to take his last deposition.

It was nearly eight o'clock when the train pulled up at Miller's Dale. Tom Perrywick, who had read the news, hurried from his carriage to see after the luggage and the vehicle which he had ordered by telegraph to be in waiting. He avoided his master and Zodack until the last moment. A porter assisted him to carry the travellers' luggage to the vehicle, which was already the centre of a little crowd of gossips, who for some hours had thought of nothing, and talked of nothing, but the affair at Cave-dale, and who were here to see Mr. Zodack Bradford and Mr. Geoffrey Lathkill, the great gentleman who was engaged to marry Adser Blythe.

Zodack and Geoffrey had scarcely exchanged a word since the first shock of the news at Derby. Such commonplace phrases of "it's an awful business," "poor Adser," and an occasional exclamation of "My God!" from Geoffrey were the only utterances.

Geoffrey was stunned. He had been witness of many a disaster, and had had his share of reverses of fortune in African adventure; but until now he had never lost his presence of mind, had always been able to keep the balance of his faculties in presence of every peril until now. His mind was chaotic, and somehow in the chaos, instead of Adser shining out the heroine she was, her sweet personality was bedraggled, something of taint had fallen upon his idealisation of her. It jarred upon him to have her name mentioned as somebody's sweetheart. There was a certain commonness in this which made the entire business appear sordid, and so strangely constituted is man that the tragedy of Jessop's return, his murder, the charge against Tregarron, the suffering of Adser, and her heroic defence of the companion of her childhood could not keep

out of Geoffrey's mind a feeling of jealousy. Unconsciously, too, he resented the whole awful business. Returning with gifts in both hands, with joyous messages, on a lovely day, and full of plans of gaiety and delight, it was a bitter thing to have this track of blood and murder drawn across his path, and with it the name of the woman he had selected, in spite of social inequalities, to be his wife and companion. Zodack, on the other hand, kept his faculties fairly clear and penetrated some of the darker passages of the mystery. He longed to be by Adser's side. The horses only crawled that kept him from her assistance. It cut him to the quick when he read the remark that she was alone without her dear friend and adviser. He mentally upbraided himself for having left her even for a day. And so the two men sat and thought and speculated and wondered as the twilight gradually changed into darkness on the hilly road to Castleton.

CHAPTER XXVII.

ADSER PROTECTS TREGARRON, THE WELSHMAN.

WHEN Zodack and Geoffrey arrived, Adser was not at the cottage. An inquest had been held on the body of Jessop Blythe, and a verdict of wilful murder against some person or persons unknown had been returned. The body was to be buried the next day. Scarthin Blythe had died, but he had made a deposition entirely exonerating Lewis Tregarron. It was to the effect that Scarthin had been hurried into the course he had taken on Staley Brentwood's information, and that he was Tregarron's assailant; that in his passion he had tried to get Tregarron upon the edge of the Winnatts and throw him over; that what Tregarron had done to him was in self-defence; and in conclusion he asked Tregarron to pardon him and to be as merciful to his

memory as he could, and to have a kind thought for his wife.

This deposition, which had only just been made known, astounded those who heard it, the curate alone excepted, for he had always endeavoured to take Scarthin's part. The reader who is behind the scenes of these events will have already guessed the chief motive of the dead man. He believed that Jessop Blythe had disclosed to Tregarron the secret of the death of the Glossop clerk. Jessop being dead, he believed that Tregarron was the only person who knew of the crime. He did not want his enemies to chuckle over his death and rejoice in the discovery of his villainy. He hated to have the woman he had married know that it was a low, brutal, and mercenary marriage; that making her his wife was only one of the many ways in which he had safeguarded himself from suspicion. It was a matter of pride with him that he should go down to his grave the impostor he had lived. He knew that Tregarron was one of those sentimental persons who would be impressed by such an act of justice and penitence as that with which he had closed his life, and that he would at once understand what his wish imposed upon him. He might have spared himself all this anxiety, for Tregarron was not the recipient of any confidence in regard to the scene which for a time had filled Jessop Blythe's memory of his last night at the Gate of the Winds. Scarthin therefore went to his last rest almost in the odour of sanctity in the estimation of some people for the very manful and generous confession he had made and sworn to before the magistrate.

The returned travellers found Mrs. Blythe sitting in the ingle-nook by the fire. She looked up when Geoffrey spoke to her, but took no further notice. Zodaack obtained no better recognition. Old Woodruffe and his grandson's wife were on the premises. They said Mrs. Blythe, after the fit she was flung into by the discovery of the murder, had said nothing, and had taken no food beyond a little gruel and beef-tea, which had been almost forced upon her. Adser had broken down once or twice in torrents of tears, but

she had been very strange. It was thought that she was hiding Tregarron in the cavern, but Mr. Mucklethorpe said that was all nonsense. He had been into every nook and corner of it. At the same time he admitted that he could not imagine where Tregarron could possibly find a hole in which to put his head about Castleton without discovery. His idea was that Adser was covering his retreat; that she was not hiding him at all; that she had only been misguiding the police, inveigling them into a local search while Tregarron was far away. What was, nevertheless, very puzzling was Adser's absence from home for hours without any trace of her. Staley Brentwood had urged the police to arrest her; but the magistrate advised that it would be sufficient to keep an eye upon her, and not let her leave the neighbourhood. This aroused a double sense of indignation in Geoffrey. Angry with Adser for having placed herself in such a position, he was resentful of the interference of Staley Brentwood, and the action of the police in regarding the girl as in the least suspect. Through all the wretchedness of the business, the scandal, the misery, the bandying of names, the coupling of Adser and Tregarron in the talk of the place and in the newspaper reports, a bitter jealousy grew up and began to choke his loftiest sentiment of love for Adser. After a little while he went to the Laurels. He asked Zodack to accompany him; but the lapidary could not spare a moment from his inquiries and investigations. He visited the room of death. He listened to old Woodruffe's account of the home-coming and the discovery of the murder. He compared notes with him about Tregarron's visit to Adser. He cross-examined him about the action of the police; and found that, so satisfied were they with the clue Brentwood had given them, they had discarded every other line of facts or suspicion. What puzzled Zodack most was the strange absences of Adser; though he was certain of the truth of her statement, assured that she was hiding Tregarron. He had one small consolation at the moment, the news of Scarthin Blythe's deposition. Adser could know nothing

of it, Woodruffe said. Zodack felt that the acquittal of Tregarron of all blame for the encounter with Scarthin was the first step to his release from the greater and baser charge. Having put aside his bag and donned his old grey coat, Zodack took up his pipe, filled it, and went out. On the threshold he almost stumbled over Sol Tidser.

"Hello! is that yo, Sol?" he said, while lighting his pipe.

"'After Many Roving Years,'" said Sol.

"Yes, poor old chap, he's come to a sad end," said Zodack.

"'Hail, Smiling Morn,'" said Sol.

"Yes, yo'll remember his owd tunes and things, nobody better; yo've lost a good friend, Sol."

"Good-bye—ah, ah—smiling morn—good-night, drunken Jessop," said Sol, darting off into the roadway and disappearing in the Dale, the sound of his voice dying away in the distance as he repeated his inconsequential exclamations, "Good-bye, drunken Jessop—good-bye—she wore a wreath of roses—come and get drunk, ah, ah," and there was a strange wildness in the dwarf's laughter that struck Zodack as unusually weird and uncanny.

"Aye, poor devil," he said, "yo've lost a good friend, that's a fact."

There was no moon, yet the night was not dark. A few stars shone brightly. The Styx chattered along its stony path. It was very peaceful and quiet; a wonderful change from London. Zodack felt the sweetness of it, though he was painfully conscious of the shadow that had fallen upon the cottage, still a poetic object in the picture his fancy was contrasting with the magnificence and the hurry and bustle of London. It was hard to realise that the spirit of murder had selected this humble, if lovely, scene for the sacrilegious crime that would now haunt its history for ever. The Lapidary's cottage and the story of Jessop Blythe would henceforth blemish the calm simplicity of Cavedale and make a sensitive person shudder as they wended their way to God's factory and the great cavern. Hitherto only the

romance of Nature and the wonders of God had been associated with the water-washed valley, crowned with that splendid relic of the past, the keep of Peveril Castle. Forward and into the centuries, the tragic story of Jessop Blythe would stamp the place with another record of man's inhumanity to man. Zodack felt much more than ever that he could remain here no longer after Adser should be gone away.

From thoughts such as these that flitted through his mind without, as he felt, any volition of his own, he passed out of a reverie into a practical mental examination of the situation. He racked his brain with all kinds of problems to account for Jessop's death, and Adser's conduct in regard to Tregarron. The first trouble, however, was the greater mystery. He had glimmerings of explanation for Adser. As for the murder, that had been committed by some vagrant, who had been tempted by the exhibition of Jessop's money and precious stones. That seemed to him to be the most likely solution of the mystery. Staley Brentwood's animosity against Tregarron was a sufficient reason in his mind for the ex-policeman's persecution of the unlucky young Welshman. Then his thoughts fell into an idle kind of speculation about luck; and Tregarron presented himself to his imagination as an example of ill-fortune, of real bad luck; and yet he could not bring himself to believe in luck, and if he could, would not Jessop Blythe's death, after all, be a tragic illustration of it? Men had come home from foreign parts, having passed through perils innumerable, to meet with fatal accidents at home, or be stricken down with some simple disease that would not have given them a finger-ache in their severer trials of the bush, the sea, or of war and pestilence overcome by strong wills and great physiques. While he was smoking and thinking, and looking up at the cottage, Geoffrey Lathkill came along.

"Anything more been heard of Adser?" he asked.

"Nowt at all that I can mek out."

"What is your idea about it?"

"I've gotten none at present!"

"But you have thought it out?"

"I have tried."

"She is sheltering this Tregarron somewhere?"

"I think so; old Woodruffe thinks her statement a ruse to get him out o' th' country."

"In that case, where is she hiding?"

"I wish to God I could tell yo; I shouldna be stanin' here."

"Nor I, nor I," said Geoffrey; but Zodack noticed that there was a want of solicitude in the remark; it sounded a note of complaint rather than anxiety; it was as if Geoffrey was waiting to demand an explanation rather than to rejoice in the girl's discovery.

"Yo're thinking badly of the lass," he said, for Zodack was not the man to conceal his own thoughts at such a moment; nor was Geoffrey less frank.

"I hardly know what I think," he replied; "it is very strange to be away at this time of night."

"Why? it's only ten o'clock."

"Not to be here, knowing we were coming," continued Geoffrey; "not to have telegraphed to us; not to have answered one of my telegrams."

"She hasna received one of them," said Zodack, "nor the letter yo wrote; they're all on my table."

"How's that?"

"Nobody's business, I suppose. Nobody gets letters or telegrams at th' cottage but me. I expect they've been put on my table by somebody; Mrs. Blythe, perhaps. Adser hasna seen them, that's certain."

"Poor child!" said Geoffrey. But the sympathetic exclamation had not, to Zodack's thinking, the right ring in it.

"God, my heart bleeds for her!" said the old man; "and me away!" There was a bitter rebuke in this simple reference to himself. Geoffrey felt it and said nothing.

"From what they tell me, th' scene between her and Jessop was beautiful. Th' lass has changed with her love for

yo. She made up wi' her father, and with her aunt, too. She behaved like an angel, old Woodruffe says."

Geoffrey did not reply, but it came into his mind to say to himself "Yes, to every one but to me." He was jealous, mad, upset. The death of Jessop Blythe was a small matter compared with his love for Adser; the killing of Scarthin affected him only as it brought Tregarron between him and her. It was probably only a passing feeling, her liking for him. Tregarron had got up early to say good-bye, and had awakened some old regard, had probably recalled their childish companionship. The Welshman was of a poetic temperament, and had moved her with some passionate appeal; her devotion to him in his trouble; a devotion that went far beyond the bounds of propriety; that had no consideration for his (Geoffrey's) position. All this pointed to some sudden revulsion of feeling against him and in favour of Tregarron. So any way ran Geoffrey's jealous reflections, and his jealousy was strengthened by his pride. Then that little bit of meanness, that at one time or another sullies the noblest character, prompted the devil Jealousy to ask him what he could expect, when he stepped down from his higher place to compete with a village swain for a village girl. He paced up and down Cavedale and wished he had never seen the place, and hated Jessop Blythe for coming home and getting killed, and hated himself for being led into such associations; and then—why then he had a fit of remorse, and upbraided himself for want of feeling, called himself a coward, denounced himself for his want of sympathy with the girl. If he had not cared a button for her, she was to be pitied by any decently disposed person; how much more so by one who loved her, who had filled her ears with his vows, and her mind with a new destiny in which he would be her loving companion. It couldn't be he felt that he was worthy of her or of any woman, or of any friendship; and in this new mood he went on tramping up and down just as indifferent to Zodack as he had been during the previous eight or ten minutes. Zodack said

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nothing. He did not even watch his friend. He smoked and leaned his back against the wall by the brook, and set himself the problems of the tragedy and its influences on Adser, and tried to solve them, but the tangle was complicated and the difficulties too great for his customary egotism.

"Why, Geoffrey!" said a voice all of a sudden. "Geoffrey!"

Geoffrey came out of his dream. The next moment Adser was in his arms.

"She's come from th' cavern," said Zodack to himself; "that's where Tregarron is, say what they like."

"My dearest!" said Geoffrey.

"Geoffrey!" repeated the girl, and burst into tears and sobbed as if her heart were breaking; "you've come, you've come."

"Yes, my dear, yes," he said, clasping her convulsively.

"I thought I should never see you again," she said between her sobs.

"If I had only known, dearest," he answered, "I would have been here long since."

"No, you didn't know," she sobbed, with little shivers between her words, quite breaking down under this first claim of love and sympathy since the terrible blow of the discovery of her father done to death.

Zodack walked away. It was better they should be alone for a minute or two, he thought, though his old arms longed to embrace the girl.

"Won't you come into the house?" Geoffrey asked, after a little awhile.

"No, no, it kills me; oh, I am so unhappy."

"Come to the Laurels, then," he said, and she walked by his side, her hand in his, down Cavedale to the Laurels.

"Oh, so very unhappy," she said, as he led her to a seat. "So unhappy."

Then Geoffrey's jealous fit came on again, and he interpreted this confession as preliminary to another.

"About Tregarron?" he said, more in the manner of stating a fact than asking a question.

"Yes," she said; "they mean to bring him to the gallows."

"You are hiding him?"

"Yes; they shall never take him."

"But if he was guilty?"

"Guilty?" she said; "he loved my father; his heart was full of gratitude and——"

"Your pity for him has revived your love for him," said Geoffrey in a low voice.

"What?" she asked, as if she had not heard aright.

"You have only just left him?"

"Only just," she said dreamily.

"You have not seen the newspapers?"

"No."

"They speak of you as Tregarron's sweetheart."

"Do they?" she said.

"Where is he?"

Geoffrey was sitting by her side as he asked her these questions, and his heart was hardened against her. She knew it. Her instinct was as keen as Zodack's. He mistrusted her. She had lost him. The thought stabbed her, but she recovered from the pain of it almost as quickly as it had come upon her.

"What is the matter with you?" she asked, rising to her feet and looking into his face. "You care for me no more? You don't believe in me. The newspapers have done it. Perhaps Staley Brentwood has been talking to you. Tell me. I dare say I can bear it; I have borne so much during the last three days."

From the shrinking, weeping girl of a few minutes previously, she was once more the defiant Adser Blythe, her eyes flaming, her face pale, her hands clinched.

"Adser, I——" began Geoffrey, nervously.

"Nay, tell me plainly, I can bear it; I know there's a blight upon all us Blythes; I know we're doomed to misfortune and misery. Tell me, Geoffrey, that you think ill

of me; that you are jealous of Lewis Tregarron; that you want to go back to London."

There was a reckless defiance in Adser's manner that half convinced Geoffrey he was right in believing that Tregarron had been able to work upon her feelings and win her back to him.

"My dear child," he said, "I will tell you. When I asked you those questions I was jealous. A little while ago I wished I had never seen you. I seem to have lost my grip of things. I loved you madly, trusted you, do now, but——"

"Nay, don't say but, if you canna trust me; if you wouldn't believe in me whatever folk said, however things might look black against me, why then go your ways, the way you came, and leave me to go down in the whirlpool of ill-luck that curses me and mine; I can bear it, nay, I will, if it kills me!"

She hurled at him a look of defiance, but with great tears in her eyes, and strode out of the door.

"Adser, you must not go like that, my love, my darling," Geoffrey exclaimed, his artistic eye as much fascinated with her at that moment as when first he saw her and his heart softening to melting.

"I'm a brute, Adser; forgive me. I do believe in you; I hate myself for the doubt; but there is no love without a little jealousy; come back."

He put his arm round her. She yielded to his touch.

"I am not considerate, either. This is no time for love-making or jealousy, I know it. Adser, it has all been such a shock to me. We read about it in the train at Derby for the first time, I and Zodaack. It stunned us."

The girl sat down silently once more by his side. He put his arms about her and kissed her. But there was a coldness at her heart that was not to be warmed back so quickly to healthy life.

"I knew that I was too happy," she said; "I feared summat would happen. It seemed as if an angel had passed over us when that woman with the banner left

Castleton; seemed as if she was leaving us to the bad angels. I don't know what came into my heart to think it. Then you left me, and Zodack went, and then poor Jessop Blythe, my father, came and——"

She had spoken these words in a kind of chant, and at the mention of her father she buried her face in her hands.

There was a knock at the door and Mrs. Midwinter entered.

"Mr. Bradford would like to see you and Miss Blythe."

"Ask him to come in," said Geoffrey, patting Adser's head as he rose to receive Zodack.

"Adser," said Zodack, "I've gotten some news for yo."

"Dear Zodack," she said, taking both his hands and bending over them, at which he stooped down and kissed her head, and almost wept over her.

"I couldna have it kept from yo no longer, unless Mr. Lathkill has tow'd yo."

She waited; Geoffrey looked at Zodack inquiringly.

"I thought yo did not understand what I was saying to yo, Mr. Lathkill," said Zodack, who, then turning to Adser, said, "Our friend has hardly been hissen since we first heard of what had happened."

"Thank you," said Geoffrey, looking at Adser; "it is only too true."

"Yonder Scarthin's dead; but before he died he made a deposition exonerating Tregarron from blame, confessing that what Tregarron did was in self-defence."

"Which sets Lewis free from that charge?" said Adser, with a new light in her eyes.

"Yes," said Zodack, "free entirely."

"Then I'll bring him to you. He's ready and willing to give himself up on the other shameful accusation, and that'll give me time. I'll tell you who——"

She paused and looked intently at both Zodack and Geoffrey.

"Yes?" said Geoffrey.

"I mean to say that I have my suspicions, but they'll keep. Can you keep a secret, Mr. Lathkill?"

"Why *Mister Lathkill*?" said Geoffrey.

"For the present," she said. "Zodack can keep a secret, I know. Can you?"

"If it is yours," said Geoffrey.

"It is mine. Come with me."

She took up from a chair a light water-proof cloak, which she had carried on her arm.

"Have you gotten your old clothes on?" she said to Geoffrey, and it sounded odd to him that she should be considering such trifles at such a moment; but it is a psychological fact that, amidst the greatest sorrows and *pari passu* with the action of the greatest tragedies, the most commonplace thoughts occur to people and the most prosaic things happen.

"Put on your water-proof, Zodack Bradford; I'm going to take you through the High Peak cavern. Adser Blythe will once more act as guide, but on this occasion it won't be necessary for Mr. Lathkill to write his name down in Mucklethorpe's book."

She laughed in a nervous kind of way as she said this. Her manner jarred upon Geoffrey, but he did not understand what a weight had been lifted from Adser's mind when Zodack informed her that Scarthin Blythe had exonerated Tregarron from blame for the fatal encounter at the Winnatts.

"It's very dark," she said, as they sallied forth into the night, "but we know the way, don't we, Zodack?"

"Yes, we know it," said Sol Tidser, with a harsh chuckle and pausing a moment by Adser's side. "Ah, ah; stairway's behind th' settle," he added, before Adser had time to turn her head. Then dashing away he shouted, "Hail, Smiling Morn!" in a tone that chilled Adser to the heart.

"Poor idiot," said Zodack, sympathetically.

"Oh, oh, sly Adser!" screamed Sol as he crossed the stream knee-deep on the way to his familiar retreat, "where's drunken Jessop—that tips the hills with gold,—ah, ah, ah, ah—shoo nivver knowed him, but I did, ah, ah. Sol knowed him, drunken Jessop!"

"Don't mind him," said Geoffrey as Adser stopped abruptly; "you are trembling."

"He makes me feel nervous to-night," she said.

"You're a false 'un, Adser!" shouted Sol, "false as the devil, ah, ah, ah, wi' his 'good-night once more, dear lass; it's all over!"

Adser leaned on Geoffrey's arm for a moment, as her father's last words, only a little transposed, were repeated by the softy, who supplemented them with a hideous laugh and a mocking shout of "After Many Roving Years" that even drew a protest from Zodack.

"Ah, yo miserable wretch! Get home with yo; get home," to which there was no reply except in a weak echo that came from the great rock ahead of them.

Then just as suddenly as she had paused Adser started forward for the cave, and with hurrying steps, for a new light had broken in upon her touching her father's death. Only some one who was secreted in the house or hidden by the window outside the chamber where Jessop had slept could have heard the words that Sol now shouted out in the darkness of the night, in a tone of bitterness and defiance. It was hard to keep to herself the suspicion that took possession of her, but she pressed on to the relief of Tregar-ron.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"IN THE SILENCE OF GOD'S FACTORY."

GEOFFREY LATHKILL entered the great cavern once more, with Adser Blythe as guide. How different the circumstances! What a change had been wrought in both their destinies within two short months! It was fitting that on this occasion the time was night, God's factory silent; Adser Blythe with an object that had nothing to do with exploiting the wonders of the Peak; Geoffrey himself no

longer a mere sight-seer. Adser led the way as she did on that sunny afternoon, when her unconventional beauty and manners captivated Geoffrey's imagination, preliminary to making conquest of his heart. Within the deep shadow of God's factory she lighted a candle and produced five others, fastened torch-like to staves which she handed to her companions, taking one herself, the candle-light making yellow splashes on the darkness, and outlining the silent drums and gaunt standards with their curious triangular fixtures and long lines of rope and twine. Looking down upon these implements of the ropery, the effect was more gruesome than picturesque, and the drip and ripple of the subterranean river seeking the open air was strange and mysterious.

"Come along," said Adser, taking a heavy key from her pocket, and preceding them to the narrow door of the cavern, which she unlocked and after letting them in, closed and locked again. "It's no darker inside than it was the day you first saw it," she said, speaking to Geoffrey, but walking on ahead.

"It has an uncanny entrance for all that this time o' night," said Zodack.

"Yes," said Geoffrey, who was absorbed with his recollections of that first visit Adser spoke of, and his silence did not escape the notice of Adser.

"Mr. Lathkill is thinking that we were a happy family when he came here first, and that th' darkness of th' cavern has got outside and fallen on us since," said Adser.

Geoffrey noted the formality of her reference to him, but said nothing.

"It's an awful business," she said, holding up her candle to throw the light of it upon some awkward turning or dip in the path, "but the confession of Scarthin Blythe makes a bit of light."

"I am glad of that," said Geoffrey.

Adser hurried on. Beams of lights and deep incidents of shadow accompanied them. Once a bat startled Zodack, rushing almost into the light he was holding aloft.

"Bats know when it's night," said Adser, "you never see them in th' daytime. I came here one night with Mr. Mucklethorpe two years ago, and a pair flew past us up into th' Victoria Hall, and once in the daytime I saw a bird go the same way and never come back, and that gave me the first idea that the learned men who believed there was a way out of th' cavern somewhere by Peveril's Castle were right, and I argued that the birds knew th' way."

"And is there a way out?" asked Zodack.

"Stoop your heads here," Adser said, "and mind the waterway. Styx is rising. If you don't mind, you'll get your feet wet."

Geoffrey held his light down and stepped over the rivulet, Zodack following.

"Rain's house is wetter than usual," said Adser. "But flood never comes that way."

"Do you expect a flood?" asked Geoffrey.

"No," said Adser; "and if there was, it wouldn't hurt us. Do you remember, Zodack, when they thought they'd gotten to rescue me?"

"Quite well," said Zodack.

"I've often laughed about that," she said. "But we've gotten out of our laughing days, haven't we?"

She turned a wistful face for a moment upon her two companions. Geoffrey felt the winning sweetness of it, and reminiscence of his first days of love and passion thrilled him. There was a silent appeal for sympathy in the tired eyes of the guide. Whenever the light fell upon her it seemed to do so lovingly, bronzing her hair, and softening the background against which her lithe and graceful figure stood out, like the fanciful figure in an artist's etching.

"The hand of affliction has fallen heavy upon us," said Zodack.

"It has," said Geoffrey.

Adser felt that there was an absence of warmth in Geoffrey's manner, a something that chilled her, and, knowing how unjust he had been in his thoughts of her, felt

herself hardening against him, notwithstanding his complete and lover-like apologies. She loved him with all her heart; but she would do what she conceived to be her duty, and she would stand by Tregarron if she lost Geoffrey forever.

"Now, Mr. Lathkill," she said, "can you climb?"

The question was put as if it were a challenge.

"Anywhere at your bidding," he answered.

"It isn't at my bidding," she said, "it's only to follow me."

Again the tone of challenge and something of defiance, which did not escape Zodack, who said to himself, "He'll not keep her unless he's as brawny in mind as he is strong of limb; she isna everybody's money; she's like th' Win-natts,—gentle, soft, and sweet wi' summer winds; but the devil in a sou'-wester."

"This is the Victoria Hall," she said, turning to both of them. "Do you remember it, Mr. Lathkill?"

"Quite well, Miss Adser," he replied, emphasising the word Miss.

She made no remark upon that; but addressed Zodack.

"This you know is Mucklethorpe's favourite spot. He'll make a speech sometimes here when he's had an extra drop of beer to's dinner. Sometimes he'll go up and light the blue fire hissen, he's so proud of it. I believe some of the folk think he's made the whole concern, he's so grand about the noble height and the vast proportions of the Victoria Hall."

Geoffrey thought she was talking now for the sake of hearing her own voice, or to repress some emotion which he did not understand.

"We don't want no blue fire to-night, do we?" remarked Zodack.

"Not until we get a bit higher up," she said.

"Won't you let me go first?" Geoffrey asked, as she began her ascent.

"I think not," she answered; "you see I know the road. I was here not long since with medicine and food."

"Tregarron's up yonder, then?" Zodack asked.

"I hope so," said Adser, looking round for a moment.

"But didna come this way, eh?"

"One of your books of proverbs says women canna keep secrets," Adser replied. "Here's one in Castleton that can keep a secret until she gives it up for the sake of a friend."

Geoffrey noted the neat foot firmly planted upon a ledge of rock above him, and held himself ready to catch the daring owner if it slipped. But Adser climbed as steadily and with as much ease as grace. He and Zodack followed with less agility. Not that the road was difficult, but the light was confusing.

"Now please rest where you are a moment," she said, as they stepped into a comfortable headway, "and I will show you the way with one of Mucklethorpe's radiators, as he calls them."

She disappeared for a moment, to reappear in the light of a pan of fire which completely opened up the heights of the cavern to them, which towered aloft into what appeared to be inaccessible peaks and roofs adorned with stalactites, that flashed and sparkled as if they were studded with gems.

"Look to the right," she said.

They turned their faces to the right, and saw a narrow passage.

"There's a block at the end; but it's only mud, the kind of débris there is below. At right angles there's a bit of a fall. It was hidden with stuff, I don't know what, when I found it. I cleared it, and there, lo and behold! were the steps the ancient Romans, Zodack loves to talk about, must have made hundreds and hundreds of years ago. When I came here at odd times, I used to block the entrance up again. You'll find a shovel in a hole above your head when you're through; but it's all open and clear now, so make your way before the radiator goes out. It's as easy now as walking down Cavedale."

A few minutes later they entered the Lady's Parlour.

Geoffrey noted with what eagerness Adser flung herself

down by the side of Tregarron, who lay more or less insensible upon the stone couch with its scant covering. She had left him an hour or two previously in good spirits. He had sat up and partaken of the simple food she had brought him. She had administered a little brandy. He had declared that he would soon be quite himself again. His head ached just a little; but it would soon be better. She had left him to reconnoitre and bring such news as might be of importance. He had collapsed in the interval.

"Lewis!" exclaimed Adser, kneeling by his side. "Lewis!"

There was no reply. Tregarron moved, and his lips parted; but he was insensible.

"We must get him away from this place," Adser said, rising to her feet. "He needs a doctor."

"We can carry him home," said Zodack; "it'll be tough to get him down to level of th' cave; but we can do it, eh, Mr. Lathkill?"

"Yes, certainly," said Geoffrey. "We can take him to the Laurels."

"Oh, thank you," said Adser; but her thanks chilled Geoffrey to the heart.

"What about th' police?" said Zodack.

"They cannot take a man to prison in his condition, can they?" she asked, turning to Geoffrey.

"I don't know."

"He's ready to face the odious charge they make against him," she said. "It was the affair with Scarthin, I was afraid of."

"He's coming to, I think," said Zodack.

Tregarron looked at Lathkill and put out his hand to Zodack.

"Very ill," he said in a whisper.

"Aye, poor chap, we're goin' to move yo. Mr. Lathkill will have yo go to th' Laurels."

Tregarron sighed, and turned his face towards Lathkill.

"They'll carry you," said Adser, bending over him.

As she spoke there was a considerable fall of rock at the

end of the stony apartment, which communicated with the descent from above.

"Heavens!" said Adser. "The tunnel's filling up."

She ran to the narrow way that was covered with the draperies which she had fastened into the interstices of the rock. The roof had fallen in. The exit outwards was blocked; not that Adser intended that they should leave the cavern by that way; but with the subsidence of the upper portion of the cavern there were also signs of a change below them.

"God!" said Zodack. "We'n only just come in time, if that!"

Geoffrey glanced right and left of him, and realised the danger. Any stoppage of the lower way, which was the only exit, must be fatal to them. Moreover, if they were imprisoned they would be beyond all relief. Nobody could have the smallest idea where they were, and if they had, the chances were against any possible rescue. Geoffrey, as they made their way into Adser's strange retreat, had noticed that here and there the formation was curiously mixed, solid limestone with shale, and here and there a cropping out of soft *débris*, like the sand of the lower reaches of the cavern.

Not one of them but realised the danger of the situation. Not one of them flinched. Zodack uttered an exclamation, called upon God, as men will under circumstances of sudden peril or affliction, and Adser did not disguise her alarm, but that was all. After the first shock they were each outwardly cool.

"It was a different thing yo'r climbing in and out o' th' place," said Zodack, "but two's different, and four on us may easily loosen a stone or two, or ease off what was otherwise a wedge and set the whole place moving."

"I'll take him by the shoulders," said Geoffrey, paying no attention to Zodack's remark; "you lift his legs, Mr. Bradford."

"I'll lead the way," said Adser, her heart beating wildly, her mouth dry with anxiety, but her step as light and firm as ever, and her voice without a tremor.

"Tregarron," said Zodack, "we're goin' to carry yo down to Castleton."

Tregarron seemed to make a great effort to help them. He partly raised his head, but he was nevertheless almost a dead weight on their hands.

Adser with a torch-like candle fastened to a stave in one hand, and in the other a lamp which she held above her head, moved forward. Tregarron with his bearers followed. As they did so, a rush of debris from the further end of the cavern hissed after them, and a few stones rolled to their feet. Adser stood still with her lights, statuesque and pale.

"To the left," she said, as they emerged from the Lady's Parlour, seen by mortal man for the last time! It was filling up as they went forth. They turned to the left, and as they did so there was a fall of earth below them, and they heard the splash and drip of water. Then the earth seemed to crumble beneath their feet. Behind them there was a rumble and rush of shale checked by shoulders of rock that were pushed out at bends of the devious ways over which Adser was leading them. The two men clung to their load and slid with the moving path; Adser, with her torch, keeping her footing with the sureness of an antelope. Her light was unsteady. It rose and fell in the darkness, but her voice was heard above the buzz and rattle of the falling earth and shale as she gave her instructions. They were as firm and definite as if no difficulty had arisen; but when she and her companions were clear of the landslip, and stood once more on the first platform of Victoria Hall, she had to cling for a little while to the railing which old Mucklethorpe had fastened there. For a moment she felt like fainting, but speedily recovered. Geoffrey and Zodack laid down their helpless burden and rested for a while. Adser, with her head against Zodack's arm, said, "Thank God, we are safe."

The falling in of the Lady's Parlour and the blocking of the way thither had come to a sudden ending. You see at the present time where a ponderous piece of rock fills

up the narrow passage which Adser years previously had discovered and cleared of débris. The interstices and small apertures which the dislodged rock had left are packed with shale and earth, from which there are, in rainy weather, slight falls with a trickling leakage of water. The entrance from above can still be traced ; but the Lady's Parlour only existed just long enough to enable Adser to shelter Tregarron, and thereby stimulate the jealousy of Geoffrey Lathkill.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A DAUGHTER OF THE PEOPLE.

THEY brought Tregarron safely to the Laurels, and the same day Jessop Blythe was buried, all Castleton attending his funeral. The coffin was borne from the Lapidary's cottage by the ropers. Woodruffe, his sons, and Zodack and Lathkill acted as pall-bearers. It was a long, solemn procession that filed down Cavedale and into the churchyard, following the body. Sol Tidser watched it from his familiar retreat up above the Styx that ran merrily along, carrying upon its brown bosom tributes of autumn leaves from the overshadowing foliage.

After the ceremony the villagers returned to the cottage and partook of the funeral baked meats, and discussed the merits of the dead, and presently listened to the last will and testament of Jessop Blythe, which raised the dead roper still higher in the estimation of Castleton and the Peak, but suggested to Staley Brentwood further motive for the guilt of Lewis Tregarron.

Adser and her grandmother had walked to the churchyard with the rest, Adser supporting Nannie Blythe with a loving arm ; the old woman doing her best to maintain a calm face. The first time she had spoken since she had staggered down-stairs to announce the death of her son was in the responses of the funeral service, and she had returned

to the cottage a resigned and gentle creature, her voice softened, her whole manner the antithesis of what it had been when first the reader made her acquaintance. It was only a short separation, she said. Jessop had gone a little while before. That was as it should be. He would be waiting for her; and they had both done their work in this world; they were due in the next, and she would only stay behind long enough to tell him how happy his bit of money had made other folk, and what a blessing Adser had been to her and to everybody. And so she concluded that it was all as it should be. It was hard to think so at first, but God knew. He was the only judge. They were all poor creatures at best, and so on, in which Adser, with tearful eyes and loving arms about the old woman, entirely concurred; yet all the time it seemed to her as if Sol Tidser kept repeating in her ear, "It's all over now; good-night, dear lass. Adser, good-night, it's all over now," and mixed up with these words her own remark to her father on that fatal night, "the stairway's behind the settle."

The moment she was free, Adser hurried off to Tidser's cottage, impelled by the belief that Sol had, in his scoffing words, half confessed the murder of her father.

"You did not come to the funeral," said Adser, addressing Mrs. Tidser, whom she found sitting by her paralytic charge in the house-place of the cottage with its bric-à-brac store and oddly stored shop-window.

"I had to tend Tidser," said the woman, looking at the paralytic.

"You never came to ask after grandmother."

"I've not been well myself," said the grey, faded, little body, still avoiding Adser's eyes.

"I'm sorry for you," said Adser; "you've had bad times, poor soul; but we have had our troubles, too, in Cavendale."

"Yes, God help you," said the woman.

"Where's your son Solomon?"

There was something ominous to the mother in this use of Sol's complete Christian name. If Adser had asked for

Sol, the woman's heart would not have sunken with so much tremor of fear and alarm. Even old Tidser seemed to recognise the something peculiar in asking for Solomon. He looked up all trembling as he always was, and seemed to question the visitor.

"Where is Solomon Tidser?" asked Adser, with a certain hardness in her voice that did not escape the observation of the old man, while it struck terror into the soul of Sol's mother.

"He is quite crazy now, quite," said Mrs. Tidser; "he's been getting worse for months—for months."

She began to move restlessly about the house.

"Yes, but——"

"He's not responsible for his actions," said the woman; "I assure you, I've often told Mr. Tregarron that——"

"Do you know what they charge Mr. Tregarron with?" asked Adser, quickly.

"I am a miserable woman. God never forgives, never. He is a jealous God, and visits the sins——"

"Yes, yes!" said Adser, impatiently; "but——"

"If prayer and suffering and penitence were of any avail," went on the woman, raising her voice and flinging up her arms, "I should have been heard. He's forgotten us, and Christ no longer intercedes."

The paralytic, his lips quivering more than usual, turned in his chair and tried to raise himself, but only to fall back into his old helpless attitude.

"Do you think, then, that you are the only people God seems to have overlooked? Stop this whining, Mrs. Tidser; stop it. God is over all, and He judges best."

Adser did not know what to say, and found herself repeating her grandmother's words.

"Lord, have mercy, have mercy!" moaned Mrs. Tidser, rocking herself to and fro, and with her eyes turned towards the ceiling.

"Where are the stones and the coins Solomon Tidser brought from Cavedale?" asked Adser, at a venture.

"What stones and what coins?" was the woman's reply.

Then suddenly she turned her face towards the door, her pale eyes fixed, her features rigid.

Adser, following the woman's gaze, heard the voice of Sol Tidser chanting the words of "After Many Roving Years," with a chuckling laugh between each line. As she turned towards the door, there Sol stood, darkening the entrance, a shadow upon a streak of sunshine that had previously fallen along the stretch of carpet that made a pathway from the right through the cottage. He stood looking into the house. With a bunch of heather and a grouse's tail feather in it, his cap was dragged down on one side of his head; his jacket flung open to his bare neck, his hair long, his trousers ragged with climbing Cavedale. He carried a long staff, and around his waist a wide leather belt,—Jessop Blythe's belt.

"Adser Blythe!" he exclaimed, with a laugh. "Adser Blythe! swift o' foot! I saw you—ah, ah—how sweet it is to come—don't mock at me! I'm Sol o' the Winnatts, ah, ah, and you thowt it was drunker Jessop, 'Hail, Smiling Morn!'"

With which disjointed snatches of song and exclamation he advanced into the house. Adser watched him with dilating nostrils, her eyes riveted upon the belt around his waist. Then suddenly springing upon him and seizing him by his open collar, she demanded almost in a whisper:

"Where did you get that belt?"

Tearing himself from her grasp, while his mother looked on helplessly, he raised his staff more in the way of emphasising his reply than in an attitude of offence.

"Ah, ah!" he laughed, "they all wanted it, th' belt,—but it was made for Sol o' the Winnatts, th' bandit o' Cavedale."

With a sudden change from banter to spitefulness, he lifted the staff angrily, exclaiming!

"Out o' the place, spy! thy granny's a witch, out! Gimme th' locket round your neck, gimmit, gimmit, spy witch; I'll strangle you."

"Dear Sol," said Mrs. Tidser, approaching him, "this is Miss Blythe."

He swept his mother aside and confronted Adser.

"Solly!" in a tremulous voice, said the paralytic, heard only by Mrs. Tidser, who went to the invalid's chair and laid her hand gently upon the man's shoulder while she still addressed Sol.

"Dear son Sol," she said, "listen to me. Miss Blythe is our dear friend; she——"

But the next moment, flinging aside his staff, Sol had flown at Adser, who was prepared for him and caught him by the throat with a grip that shook him where he stood.

He flung up his arms, and as he did so Adser hurled him to the ground. Acting instantly upon her advantage she laid hold upon him and dragged him to his feet. He stared at her in amazement.

"Come with me," she said, "come!" and she pulled him to the door.

"Nay, Miss Blythe, what would you do?" said Mrs. Tidser, following to the door, and then breaking down in tears and staggering to a chair.

Adser, taking no heed of the woman and strengthening her hold on Sol whenever he showed the least inclination to struggle, dragged him into the narrow street and on towards the village. She had established with her first assault a mastery over him. He was cowed and afraid; he had glimmerings of an intention to fight, but Adser's knuckles pressed upon his throat every now and then, and she dragged him almost off his feet, so that he went along in a half run, and now and then his feet trailing.

"Come, come, idiot! murderer!" said Adser, beginning to lose her self-control. "Vile wretch, miserable, come and suffer, come and free the innocent!"

And thus they passed the lower path of Cavedale, on by the castle and into the market place. A crowd gathered. People came to their doors, and at once everybody seemed to understand that Sol Tidser was the criminal for whose deed Lewis Tregarron was under suspicion.

As Sol began to notice the crowd, a certain misty sense

of his undignified position smote his scattered intellect. He pulled himself together and stood firmly on his feet.

"Ah, ah," he laughed. "Me and Adser Blythe, th' two guides, we'll show you! 'After Many Roving Years'; here, curse and damn it, leave go!"

He was free only for a moment. Adser sprang upon him like a hawk and pinned him against the lock-up-wall. She looked a veritable termagant, her hair flying about, her hat on the back of her head, her face livid with excitement. She was not at the moment a picture calculated to inspire or encourage the tender passion, yet Geoffrey Lathkill felt his heart beat strangely as he hurried up and caught Sol from her grasp, with the exclamation, "What is it, my dear girl, what is it?"

"Oh, thank you, Geoffrey," she said, panting for breath, with the crowd pressing upon her, and the inspector of police made his welcome appearance.

"What's the row here?" he exclaimed.

"What is it, Adser?" Geoffrey asked, still holding Sol, who squirmed and struggled.

"I charge him with murder," said Adser, in a low voice, her lips parched, her head swimming. "Look at that belt round his waist."

"Here, come along," said the inspector. "Leave him to me, sir," and the lock-up door presently closed upon Solomon Tidser.

"May I go home with you?" said Geoffrey.

"Yes," she said.

"Will you lean on my arm? You must be very tired."

He drew her arm within his own. It was a saint's day in the calendar, which the curate chose to remember with a special service. The organ was pealing as they passed the church. The doors were open and the music came streaming out into the autumn sunshine.

"Let us go in," said Adser.

They sat in the pew that belonged to the Laurels, and Adser, full of gratitude, knelt down in the farthest corner

of the dark old pew and gave thanks to God for all His mercies, and wept as she prayed.

When the service was over and she had walked to the cottage once more, she asked Geoffrey if he had any idea of the peril through which they had passed in the cavern, and he said yes, he knew that at that moment they might have been immured in a living tomb; then how much had she to be thankful for that she had not led him to his death? Geoffrey answered that if in his last moments he could have wiped out all cause of misunderstanding between them; if she could have assured him that she loved him, and him only, and ever had and ever would, why then he would have died content, if it had been God's will so to end his days.

"Geoffrey," she answered, her voice trembling, "I feel as if we were walking through the valley of death. Is it not sinful at such a time to be thinking of ourselves? My heart bleeds for that unhappy mother whose son is only just buried, and for that other son who is worse than dead, and whom I have dragged to his doom; and, oh, Geoffrey, how can you still think of me?"

"How can I not think of you, Adser? I feel the misery and pathos of the valley; but if this were indeed the Styx, I would cross it with you, Adser, and share your fate, whatever it might be, so you said you loved me and none other."

Geoffrey thought he was speaking the truth when he claimed to feel the sombre influence of their surroundings, but he had only one thought—his love for the girl, his love and his fear, his jealousy and his love.

"You are very good to me," said Adser. "I am not worthy to be your wife. Did you see me tearing through the village with that miserable wretch, a brawler, a good for nowt as some of the villagers call me, Blythe's lass, guide to th' cavern? Oh, Mr. Lathkill, think before you link your name with mine! I shall never be a fit companion for you. I know that is what Zodack thinks; and, besides, what is to become of grandmother? and how can

you say to your friends, 'That young woman whose name was in the papers is my wife!'

"If this had been some besieged town, and you a daughter of the people, taking your place at your father's gun when he had fallen for his country, you would have been the heroine of a battle poem, and to me you are more than such a heroine, for you have played your part in an humble field, with the courage and self-denial of the maid of Saragossa. My dear Adser, love is not love that only lives in the sunshine. Give me the right to comfort and to protect you."

"Geoffrey," said Adser, laying her head upon his shoulder, "it was just here where I first saw you. If I had never seen you again, I should, all the same, have never forgotten you all the days of my life. Soon after I knew that I loved you. Whatever happens, I love you now with all my heart! I have never loved any other, and I never shall."

"Thank God!" said Geoffrey, and they went into the cottage.

CHAPTER XXX.

TWO YEARS LATER.

AFTER the great scenes are over, Romance settles down into the ways of ordinary life. The pioneer who has fought his way through the dark Continent marries and lives in Mayfair. From the camp fires of eastern battle-fields, the soldier retires upon his game of whist at Boodles. The heroine who has been the nine-days' wonder of the world is lost in the crowd that is continually changing its idols. Weary at last even of the adulation of a nation, the great statesman drops quietly out of the fight and goes home to dream away his later years among his books. The hero of many a hard won victory hangs up his sword and smokes the pipe of peace while others carry on the war of empire. Every Romance becomes a story that is told.

And so it is with the history of "that lass o' Blythe's" and Geoffrey Lathkill, the wandering Englishman whom Fate one sunny day dropped down among the peaks and plains of Derbyshire. It is with satisfaction and pleasure that the historian of their joys and sorrows is enabled to conclude his record with a picture of happy days, the only shadows being passing clouds of memory.

"As we are confessing things," said Mrs. Lathkill, still with a touch of the northern dialect, but only so much as gave piquancy to her speech and manner, "I'm willing to admit that this is better than the Lapidary's cottage at Cavedale, and yet——"

"Yes?" said Geoffrey, "and yet?"

"I wish you had bought the Laurels when the Cavedale property came into the market."

"Why didn't you say so, my dear?"

"I don't know; I thought you'd had enough of Castle-ton."

"Did you?" Geoffrey answered, smiling.

"And, besides, I always seem to be wishing for something that is bought for me before the wish is out of my mouth."

"It is what our friend Zodack Bradford would call a nice bit of property, the Laurels, freehold with a meadow at the back and room enough to build a studio and a guest room or two."

"Yes," said Adser, "and——"

"Mrs. Midwinter was willing to remain and keep house for any desirable purchaser," said Geoffrey, again interrupting his wife.

"Indeed!" said Adser, looking out across the lake, her mind travelling far away to the valley of the Styx.

"Well, now, what would you say if I *had* bought it?"

Adser looked up, her deep blue eyes full of enquiry and hope.

"What would you say if the plans have been made for the extension, and that probably by this time the builders are at work, and Mrs. Midwinter is taking a little holiday

prior to entering upon her duties as Mrs. Lathkill's housekeeper at the Laurels?"

"Say!" exclaimed Adser; "what I have so often said before, that you are the kindest and the best husband in the world."

She laid her soft cheek against his face, and his response was an embrace that was broken in upon by a knock at the door, and the entrance of Perrywick with a bundle of letters. Geoffrey took the mail and laid it on the table, with a collection of others that he had already read, and led his wife into the wide verandah that shaded the prettiest of French parlours that overlooked the lake of Bourget in the picturesque Savoy.

"Now, my dear, here's your favourite seat, and we'll continue our confessions, eh?" said Geoffrey.

Adser looked the picture of health. A certain refinement of pose and carriage had come to her with her finer clothes and her newer duties and her efforts to lay to heart the lessons and warnings of Zoddack Bradford in the anxious days of Cavedale. Geoffrey was proud of her, and Aix-les-Bains regarded her as one of the most distinguished-looking women the spring and early summer season had ever brought to the valley of Bourget.

Geoffrey had rented the Villa Montana for the season, and Mr. and Mrs. Lathkill with their little son Jessop, his nurse, and a small retinue of servants would remain until the end of July, when they were due at Buxton for the grouse shooting, and, as Geoffrey now explained, in order that Mrs. Lathkill might superintend the alterations and improvements at the Laurels.

"I sometimes wonder if I am too happy," said Adser. "Don't you remember when everything seemed as beautiful as the scene right here, and how beautiful it is," she said, as her eyes wandered over the blue waters, with their vine-clad margins and green hillsides; "don't you remember what a storm came up that well-nigh ruined us all?"

"Yes, Adser, I remember," Geoffrey replied; "but we have had our storms, and the peace we are enjoying is the

calm that comes after the tempest, not the calm that precedes it."

"To think that all this might never have been—our marriage, the God-gift of our boy, our happy days in London, the kindness to me of your good friends, and this happy time at Aix. God has been very good to me."

Adser looked round at Geoffrey as she spoke, her eyes full of tender feeling. Her dull red hair was gathered in a careless tangled bunch high upon her head. She wore a light morning dress, which was deepened in tone by the shadow of an oleander that filled one end of the verandah with leaves and flowers.

"To us, to us, dear," said Geoffrey. "I have often thought how strange it is that two people, who love each other so that to them they two are all the world, can run the risk of the misery of parting for a whim, a foolish doubt, a careless word, a matter of pride—false pride, for it is sure to be that. When I look at you, Adser, and think that once I was fool enough to turn my back upon you and my own happiness, my dearest hopes and the possibility of the happiness of this day, I feel that I grow pale at the very remembrance of what I might have lost."

Thereupon the big, happy, lazy fellow rose from his seat and solemnly took his wife into his arms and hugged her.

"The strangest thing is that you who should have been the proudest were the humblest. I, who had everything to be ashamed of and nothing to be proud of, was just as high and mighty as a duchess might have been. I think it was the knowledge of my common birth, my poor surroundings, nay, my everything that barred me from such a marriage as I made, that made me defiant and toss my head as I know I did, and give myself all kinds of silly airs and——"

"I will not hear you say one word that does not give you all the rights and privileges of the prettiest and the best girl that ever lived," said Geoffrey, closing her lips with a kiss.

"Very well," said Adser; "then tell me all about Tregarron and Zodack. Where are they now?"

"In Paris," said Geoffrey; "I have letters from both of them, and I have wired that they must not go on to London without coming here."

"You have?"

"Yes; you'd like to see them?"

"Immensely," said Adser.

"Zodack is funny and dry. He says Tregarron is what they call in the Peak a regular lady-killer; a year ago in San Francisco he really thought Lewis would marry and settle down, but she was a widow, and Zodack talked him out of it; and he met a Welsh girl in Melbourne who claimed him as her cousin; they were very friendly until Tregarron found she had another cousin, and then he railed against the whole sex for a fortnight, after which he found consolation in the smiles of the daughter of the landlady of a restaurant where they lived for a time in Sydney; his most serious case occurred at Amsterdam; indeed, Zodack hardly knows whether that is serious still."

It is only right that the historian should here interpolate a remark or two which possibly the reader, knowing Zodack, will have anticipated, namely, that Tregarron's mild flirtations had been exaggerated in order that both Geoffrey and Adser should think the Welshman had entirely recovered from his infatuation; that, indeed, he had easily found consolation for the loss of Adser. This was not altogether true, neither was it altogether false; it might be taken for an illustration of the comprehensiveness of the English form of oath that made for the truth the whole truth and nothing but the truth. At the same time Zodack did not know to what extent Tregarron's philosophy had modified the sting of his disappointment. Tregarron kept his misery to himself, and made much of every opportunity to forget what he considered he had lost; for, though Adser had never accepted his offers of love, he persisted in regarding her as the woman who should have been his wife. This drop of bitterness in his cup did not so taint life's draught

that it was intolerable. It is possible that it may have been a tonic in the direction of his ambition to learn and to know. He was often cheerful, and always deeply interested in everything he saw. If he was not the "lady-killer" Zodack painted, he was no misanthrope.

"By the way," continued Geoffrey, still repeating the news in Zodack's letter, "Zodack has made up his mind to settle—where do you think of all places in the world?"

"Cavedale?" said Adser, with a faint hope in her heart that she might still see the old place as it used to be, with Zodack at his wheel, and—— But, no, that was impossible.

"Cavedale?" said Geoffrey; "where would he settle at Cavedale? Not at the cottage, his place is filled. Besides, he is ambitious to do something great in his old age."

"New York?" said Adser.

"No."

"San Francisco?"

"No."

"New Zealand?"

"No."

"I shall never guess," said Adser, at length; "here in Aix, perhaps? I think I could settle here. Did you ever see anything so lovely as the purple reflections on the blue water yonder?"

"It is all very lovely," said Geoffrey, his arm about the questioner, his eyes following the direction of her finger, indicating a stretch of blue water with illuminated shadows as a cluster of fleecy clouds passed slowly over the sun. "I remember when I thought the Vale of Hope as lovely, viewed from a meadow near Castleton, but it needed no sunshine nor any blue waters with purple shadows to make it a dream of poetry and romance to me in those days."

"My dear Geoffrey," said Adser, "what would have become of me if I had never met you, I often wonder!"

"It was never intended from the first day of our lives that we should not meet. To mere mortal ken it was a simple accident that took me to Cavedale. But depend upon it, Fate or Providence, or whatever we call the author

of our destinies, had arranged it all; and, furthermore, had deemed it wise to torture me with the possibilities of losing you that I might all the more appreciate the gift the gods provided."

"It is pleasant to go on being lovers after two years of married life," said Adser; "but who could help being lovers in a scene like this—and with such music; listen——"

It was a party of pleasure on the lake, and there were minstrels on board singing a love ditty to an accompaniment of mandolins. The rowers were hugging the shore on its shady margin, and the happy, languorous strains rose straight up to the balcony of the pretty chateau which Geoffrey had rented for the spring and summer in this sweet and romantic corner of the picturesque Savoy.

"But I have not told you half the news that comes to us in Zodack's letter," said Geoffrey, after a while. "Shall we once more return to earth and mundane affairs? Well, where was I? Oh, you were guessing where Zodack had resolved to settle. In Amsterdam."

"Where they cut the diamonds? Why, of course, he used to talk about Holland, and admire the people, their courage, their industry, and when my father—poor dear Jessop Blythe—sent me the stones from America, Zodack talked about the diamond cutters of Amsterdam."

"Well, he has either bought into a business there or is going to start on his own account as a lapidary. He finds no nonsense there, he says, about socialism in theory, but something of the rightful practice of it, though he has come upon nothing in his travels so genuine and true, so real and practical as the arrangements of your God's factory in the Peak; but, oh, he says, if old Woodruffe and the rest could see how rope, and twine, and cables are made by the latest machinery, they would feel something like an ancient Egyptian agriculturist in presence of a steam-plough and a threshing-machine. In America, he says, they do everything by machinery, and live as if they were part of some vast machine themselves."

"It is funny for Zodack to be talking of old Woodruffe. Why, how old is Mr. Bradford? He must be sixty-five."

"I dare say he is; but then he is like that bothering old fellow in 'As You Like It' who has so much to say about his prudence and sobriety. Depend upon it, Zodack laid in a good long-lived constitution in the regular hours and contented mind of his early manhood. When he was with me in London, he showed powers of endurance that would have done honour to an Arab of the desert; but he never boasted of his virtues, did he?"

"No, Zodack had too much thought for others to talk of himself; but he would not like to hear you say a word against Shakespeare."

"Heaven forbid! I don't like old Adam, for all that; but I think it is because the actors overdo his temperance and devotion so much, and dramatists and story-tellers have given us so many imitations of him in their honest butlers and serving-men and other family retainers."

"And haven't they imitated Romeo and Juliet?" said Adser, laughing. "And were you not only last night quoting something about a love scene in a balcony?"

"Yes, yes," said Geoffrey, "and what a love scene! Ours at Castleton was tame to it, eh? In words, only in words! I felt it all!"

It was natural to emphasise this confession with an embrace in which possession seemed the sweeter at thought of what might have been if Love had not conquered Jealousy.

"Well, now to finish your news; though I would like to have you lengthen it out with talk about ourselves until sunset," said Adser, composing herself once more in her basket chair to listen.

CHAPTER XXXI.

"HAIL, SMILING MORN!"

GEOFFREY referred to the open letters he had laid on the table, and found that Zodack had not yet concluded the Amsterdam transaction; but whatever he did Tregarron resolved to join him. They are to be inseparable, it seems; and the old man speaks in the most affectionate terms of his lad, as he calls Tregarron, while the Welshman declares that Zodack is an elderly male angel that heaven couldn't possibly make a better if it tried,—the most self-denying, good, honest, lovable, old chap, look you, that it is possible for man to conceive or imagine.

"It is true," said Adser, "every word of it. It says a great deal for Tregarron that he is capable of understanding Zodack Bradford; there would have been no Adser Lathkill if Zodack had not taken care of Adser Blythe."

"God bless the dear old chap!" said Geoffrey; "we must take rooms for them at the Hotel de l'Europe."

"Why at the hotel?"

"They'll be happier there," said Geoffrey. "After wandering all over the world, from one hotel to another, it would be like trapping wild birds to lodge them here and ask them to submit to the discipline of a private establishment."

"Perhaps you are right; it will be very odd to see Zodack wandering about Aix. Do they gamble in any of the places where he and Tregarron have been staying?"

"My dear, they gamble everywhere; but in England they call it speculation, and they do it secretly and by watching tapes or by time bargains on the Stock Exchange. I dare say Zodack is quite a knowing hand by this time at baccarat, roulette, poker, kino, and every other mischief."

Geoffrey was wrong. Zodack and Tregarron had found life possible, even in the Western States of America, with-

out gambling, and during their short visit to Aix-les-Bains they were content to put down their five or ten francs upon the tables now and then by way of curiosity, and not care any more than Geoffrey did whether they won or lost. Tregarron had become quite a buck. He met Mrs. Lathkill with an evident effort at sangfroid, but with a keen sense of envy of Lathkill in his heart. This passed off by and by, and he submitted with a good grace to the raillery of Adser over Zodack's revelations of what Adser persisted in calling Tregarron's little affairs.

Tregarron and Zodack were quite at home amidst the gaieties of Aix. Two years of travel, without the checks of fancy and desire that come of stinted means, had proved a remarkable education to Tregarron, the Welshman. It had enabled him to use the miscellaneous learning he had laboriously acquired at Castleton to the best advantage, and it had given a polish to his manners and conversation. He was well dressed, and had a certain air of distinction that attracted attention. His hair was still long and black, his complexion sallow, but his eyes were less sunken than of yore, and his lips were red; his complexion had a healthy glow. He carried himself with the grace of an athlete. Geoffrey in his happy moods would profess to Adser that if he and Tregarron had to begin their fight for her from this point of the Welshman's favour he would certainly have trembled for the result. Tregarron was just a little conscious of the improvement in his appearance, and Zodack fed the flickering flame of natural vanity by constant references to his fine gentleman friend, his lordly Welshman, the lady-killer. As for Zodack, he looked wonderfully well. His wrinkles were genial ones. They clustered about his eyes. His cheeks were ruddy. His iron-grey hair had thinned somewhat. He was clean-shaven as usual, and kept that Rip-Van-Winkle look the Garrick men professed to see in him on his memorable visit to town. He adhered to the old fashion of his coats—tailed and brass-buttoned—and the white high stock.

One evening, as they were all sitting in the Garden des

Fleurs adjoining the hotel where Zodack and Tregarron were staying, Geoffrey's eyes fell upon a smart, dapper-looking gentleman walking by the side of a bath-chair, dapper enough, he thought, for the Buxton draper who first talked to him about Adser, but aristocratic enough in his style for the bluest blood of the North.

"By Jove, it is!" he exclaimed. "It's Marshall, Mr. Thomas Marshall."

"And who is Mr. Thomas Marshall?" asked Adser Lathkill.

"Saint Madeline's secretary, Saint Madeline's agent in advance, by Jupiter!"

"Don't get excited, Geoffrey," said Adser, laughing. "People are looking at you. They think you are bothered about the music. Don't you hear what they are playing? A selection from the Parsifal."

"Yes, love, I beg your pardon; but don't you remember Madeline White, Saint Madeline of the sacred banner?"

"Yes, of course."

"I believe that is she. Fancy Saint Madeline in a bath-chair!"

While they were speaking the music stopped, and Mr. Marshall raised his hat to the bath-chair, which was wheeled away by a stout servant in livery. Thereupon he took a general observation of the crowd, and saw Geoffrey, to whom he at once made his way. Zodack and Tregarron begged to be excused. They were going to take a stroll through the rooms and watch the wheel of fortune, and perhaps tempt the fickle goddess to the extent of a louis or two. As this is the last time we shall see them in these pages, the reader will be glad to note how the devoted couple go off, arm in arm, two dear happy friends, the eldest of the two just as full of hope and vitality as the younger; both with knowledge enough of good and evil to be weary of the latter; both capable of honest enjoyment; both their paths made smooth by the generous thoughtfulness of Jessop Blythe. . . . While one is saying this, it will be in good time and place to note that a year ago, on the

death of old Tidser, the poor grey little widow, with the money left them by Jessop Blythe, bought a cottage near the Asylum for Criminal Lunatics at Derby, and went to live there that she might be near her son, who, being convicted of the murder of the returned exile, had his sentence commuted, on the ground of insanity, to a life-long immurement. A stern sense of religion, with a full belief in the decree that visits the sins of the fathers upon the children, kept Mrs. Tidser whole in her faith of final forgiveness, and she found in her gratitude for a competence of the means to live, sufficient patience for a life divided between chapel-going and occasional visits to the prison for criminal lunatics. She saw Sol Tidser once a month, and sometimes spoke to him, but he had degenerated in confinement. His spirits had fallen far below the zero of even an assumed mirth. He was dull, morose, and in ill-health. What little mind was left, required, as did his body, for ordinary health, the fresh air of the Peak and the exercise that had kept the lad strong, despite his mental and physical disabilities. He no longer chanted his reminiscences of Jessop Blythe. Only now and then, when he seemed to recognise his mother, had he any word for her of consolation or the joy of seeing her. But she was content, as Mrs. Blythe had grown to be, in the reflection that God knew best, and that, after all, this life is only a pilgrimage to a better. Mrs. Blythe was, however, of a more cheerful disposition than Mrs. Tidser, and she had opportunities of atoning for what she conceived to be her want of generosity in the past. She was well off, had plenty for herself and a good deal for others. She went about Castleton with her familiar crutch-stick, no more a wrangler and a scold, but a middle-class Lady Bountiful, her stick no longer a weapon of offence. The sound of its patter on the pavement was a note of coming good; it was no longer likened to the broom upon which witches ride to the moon, but a fairy wand that conjured up the very things the people wanted in poverty and sickness, and tradesmen in trouble for money to pay rent and overdue bills, and yet Mrs.

Blythe was satisfied to still go on living at the cottage. She rented the museums and work-rooms to one of Woodruffe's sons, who had been brought up as a lapidary at Aberystwyth, and she kept the remainder of the house for herself and a roper's widow with two children. She would often sit in the sun and watch the little ones at play, and dream that the boy was her own dear Jessop, and sometimes that the girl was her ill-treated Adser; for you see she was old, and much trouble had set her thoughts to the music of long ago. There was a certain kind of music that was locked up in her sitting-room that she would, nevertheless, never listen to again, she declared, until her time came to follow Jessop, her son, and then she would have the old tune turned on, and the box should sing to her, as she went to sleep, Jessop's favourite song of "Hail, Smiling Morn!"

CHAPTER XXXII.

"THE FAILING OF THE SACRED BANNER."

BUT to return to our dapper friend, who for the moment recalled Mr. Jerry Bray. Geoffrey rose to receive Mr. Thomas Marshall, and introduced him to Mrs. Lathkill with great impressement. Mr. Marshall was no longer the anxious, despondent gentleman whom Geoffrey had met for a few minutes during Mr. Marshall's secretarial and managerial occupation in connection with Miss Madeline White's quixotic, if sincere crusade against unholiness and irreligion. He was a mirthful young gentleman of fifty, well preserved, a clean thin face with side whiskers, a small head neatly set upon a pair of somewhat narrow shoulders, grey hair, a tortoise-shell eye-glass swinging by a narrow ribbon, a thin grey suit of well-cut clothes, frock-coat and white waist-coat, a white straw hat, a pleasant laugh, a light Malacca cane, and indeed, as Geoffrey remarked afterwards,

"a devil of a fellow, don't you know, and yet one of the best of good fellows," with a bit of pardonable affectation, more or less natural to him, and possibly covering a constitutional nervousness.

"Proud, I am sure, to meet you, Mrs. Lathkill; your husband, old friend of mine, very; used to shoot together; hope you like Aix; yes, a delightful place, so leisurely, no fuss, and the baths charming."

Mr. Marshall rattled on and bowed every now and then, until at last, overcoming his evident nervousness, he sat down and the conversation became general.

"Oh yes," he said, in answer to a question from Geoffrey, "the lady is not unknown to you—here for the baths; weakened her constitution somewhat by arduous labours in the interest of the poor and sinful; her benevolent nature has received many shocks—many hard shocks—ingratitude of poor—insincerity of professing Christians—fine exceptions to that rule, of course—she has still some devoted friends and admirers."

"Among whom Mr. Thomas Marshall may be counted, eh?" said Geoffrey, laughing.

"Naturally," said Marshall, with a toss of his head, "naturally. What do you say, Mrs. Lathkill?"

"I think Miss White lovely. More like an angel than any woman I ever saw," said Adser.

"Thank you, Mrs. Lathkill," said Marshall, with his most appreciative smile, and rising from his seat to make a little bow, still rather nervously.

"Oh, don't thank me for so small a compliment to so great a lady," said Mrs. Lathkill.

"But I do, madam, I do with all my heart; and I shall take great pleasure in reporting you to her. You see——"

Here he paused, catching a very enquiring look in Geoffrey's eyes, and the half-formed question that was in Geoffrey's mind came out in a sudden way.

"Why, you don't mean to say that——"

"Yes, indeed, I do; and why not?" said Marshall, putting

up his eye-glass and fixing Geoffrey with a sudden attitude of defiance.

"Oh, I don't know why, the lady being willing; on the contrary, thinking it over only for a moment, it strikes me as possibly the very best thing that could have happened to her; but where's the banner?"

"It hangs as a sacred relic in the chapel of St. Mary, down in the village on the Thames, where the old house of the Friars has been converted to the sacred service of the Church," said Marshall, with a firmness of demeanour in contrast with his previous nervousness.

"You are talking riddles; perhaps I had better leave you," said Adser, pretending that she felt herself in the way.

"Not at all, my dear Mrs. Lathkill. I will tell you all about it. The lady you knew as Miss Madeline White—Saint Madeline—is my wife, God bless her, one of the best creatures that the Divine Master ever breathed the breath of life into!"

"I'm sure of it," said Adser, encouragingly.

"I daresay you think it was presumption of me to propose to so lovely, so sublime, and so wealthy a lady, I being only her secretary, but having been trusted by her father, and being quite above pecuniary considerations, for I had a very good patrimony of my own,—well, you see, when my dear young mistress became disappointed and run down, tired and sick at heart of being made the dupe of rich and poor alike, weary of tramping the land for converts to Christ, and only picking up worshippers of Mammon who fleeced her,—not really trying to get to Christ, but only trying to get their hands in her pocket,—the Roman Catholics at last got hold of her. They had angled for her from the first. They saw that it was an æsthetic as well as a religious soul. They angled for her with music and song, with vestments and with incense, aided all the time by the tremendous influence of her father's brother, who had ten years previously become a priest, and knew how to capture rich converts, or, as he would say, rescue sinners from hell. Not to dwell upon this, they induced her to join the Church.

They prevailed upon her to give up her scheme of evangelisation; they showed her other means of comforting the poor and drawing souls to heaven. She seemed happier; but she grew weak and ill, and the family doctor as well as an expert advised me that she needed some great change; they hinted at a long sea voyage, but the priests had other views; they wished her to enter a religious house with a view to taking the veil; and something she said about having no protector, being alone in the world and without any disinterested guide among her relatives, quickened in me the slumbering love for her that I hardly dared to acknowledge to myself. After brooding over it, and endeavouring to probe her feelings by occasional suggestive remarks and questions, I came to the conclusion that it was going to be a fight between me and the Church; a sacrifice was needed, a sacrifice had been decreed by Fate. The question was, on which altar, that of Mary or Hymen? and, my dear Mrs. Lathkill, I buckled on my armour like one of those brave knights of old—beings whom she worships to this day. I took up my shield of love and my sword of honour and entered the lists against the champions of the Church; and I won her,—yes, by all the gods, I captured her,—and from the very day she laid her white hand in mine and said, 'Thomas Marshall, you have always been a true knight, and good to me, I will marry you,' she has been getting well, and is happier than I ever remember her. And that is my romance, Mrs. Lathkill. Your husband will understand and appreciate it, perhaps, better than you can; but I am proud of it. I have never had the satisfaction of relating it to anyone before, and it has done me good, I assure you; and if you will do Mrs. Marshall the honour and pleasure of coming to see her, she will be delighted, I am sure. The villa with the green balcony and roses,—first turning to the right beyond the pump-room, on the left as you turn towards the high road—can't mistake it; *au revoir*; so delighted to have met you."

Taking off his hat, he indulged in one of his lowest bows and hurried away.

"A good fellow," said Geoffrey, "but his conquest has turned his head a little."

"He was funny, was he not?" said Adser, raising her fan to hide her laughter, lest anyone should have seen the interview and come to the conclusion that she was quizzing her husband's friend.

"Funny is not the word for it," said Geoffrey; "he's ridiculous, but he'll get over that. I fancy he had an idea that I might rate at him for marrying an heiress—his master's daughter. On the contrary, I think he is a hero,—a little one, I grant you. Fancy that romantic young woman in white with her sacred banner, her religious impulses and her ambitious soul, bowing her neck to the Romanist yoke and ending as the wife of Tommy Marshall. Well, well, we know what we are as your friend Shakespeare says, but we know not what we may be. We must call upon them at once, eh?"

"Certainly," said Adser; and after a drive round the lake with Master Lathkill and his nurse, Perrywick on the box by the side of the French coachman, and Geoffrey reading extracts from his latest bundle of letters, he and Adser made their formal and friendly call at the villa with the green verandah and the roses.

A dreamy old garden: Mrs. Midwinter's with a difference. The difference was the sun and the blue sky, a softness and languor that Castleton never knows, a perfume suggesting Araby and Lallah Rookh, the intensity of floral scents, and a poetic atmosphere that belongs to nature without the impulse of human sentiment that is necessary as an accompaniment of the northern atmosphere. Madeline White was reclining upon a couch near an open window overlooking flower-beds that seemed to mount the outer fences of vines and climb by steps of verdure, terrace upon terrace, to the mountain peaks that basked in the summer heat of a sky that was blue as a sapphire. She was reading an Italian poet, whose verse was decorated with illuminated initials and painted margins. Close by on an inlaid table of Italian design stood an ivory crucifix among a mis-

cellaneous collection of scent bottles, conserves, and bunches of cyclamen. The room was lavishly furnished. A bay-window opening upon a terrace was filled with palms and oleanders. The lady of the sacred banner still clung to a certain ecclesiastical vogue in her surroundings, although she had given her hand to Mr. Thomas Marshall, who entered the room with his modern and somewhat foppish manner full of his news of the Lathkills, and with a bouquet of flowers that he might have presented to a prima donna of the lyric stage. The incongruity of the scene, with Marshall as the husband of the æsthetic lady with her missal-like book, and her chaste robe of white, may strike the reader, but it was in no sense unusual either to Madeline or to Marshall. She had known no happier days than those of her married life; and Marshall literally walked on air. He had not only saved his master's daughter from herself and her estates from the priests, but he had found it a continual holiday to administer to her every whim, and he had the satisfaction of witnessing her gradual and sure restoration to health. It was a strange transformation, nevertheless, from Saint Madeline of the sacred banner to Mrs. Thomas White Marshall undergoing "the cure," so called, at Aix-les-Bains.

"I never was more surprised," said Mr. Marshall, "never—and I must say I was delighted to see them."

"Of course," said Madeline, in her sweet, soft voice. "I am sure it will be a great pleasure to meet them."

"I think she is the most remarkable young woman in my experience—from a mere peasant to a lady of distinction. Yes, I say it advisedly, of distinction."

"But she was more than a peasant, dear," said Madeline; "I remember you telling me that you were struck with a something curiously refined in her manner."

"Such an air," went on Mr. Marshall, "such an air, so self-possessed, and her very accent a beauty, a kind of elocutionary melody, if I may so describe it, that belongs to fine music and to noble oratory."

"She has made you eloquent," said Madeline.

"Beauty is the soul of inspiration," Mr. Marshall replied, bending over the saint-like Madeline and kissing her white forehead.

"Were they as pleased to see you as you were to see them?"

"I think they were," said Marshall; "yes, I really think they were. Lathkill was always on good terms with me; something of a cynic, I think, but with a good heart."

"No doubt," said Madeline, and the picture of a handsome, stalwart young fellow, in a grey shooting jacket, a gun over his shoulder, passed through her mind, with rapid thought of past possibilities which the secretary, of those having a gift of observation, did not overlook.

"Once upon a time," he said, "I encouraged him in an ambition I dared not then even dream of for myself."

"Ah, Thomas," said Madeline, "we are all of us too reticent; you were very needful to me even in those days," said Madeline.

"Dearest," responded Thomas, "I shouldn't wonder that if it had been the fashion to tilt at tournaments I might have entered the lists as the mysterious knight with visor down to try and win the reward of beauty."

"I'm sure you would," said Madeline; "but when may we expect Mr. and Mrs. Lathkill? I must dress for them."

"Between now and four or five o'clock. But I forgot to tell you, they have a little one. I did not see it, but Lathkill says it is the image of his wife,—they drive with the little chap,—yes, he said it was a boy,—every afternoon. You remember the pretty village among the trees on the hillside just under the shadows of Le Mont du Chat? well, that is their place; they stay until August, when they go to Derbyshire for grouse shooting, and Lathkill is having a house in Cavedale got ready for his wife—they both love the Peak. You did not care for it, nor I, a cold, unconvincible kind of people, and you had a sulky controversial opponent among the toilers at that remarkable industry in the cavern,—a wonderful place. She was the redeeming

feature of it—that girl of the people who is now a grande dame, I assure you."

Mr. Marshall rattled on as he took Madeline's hand and conducted her to her room, whence by and bye she reappeared in a dainty tea-gown, to receive visitors and preside over an afternoon tea-table with the quiet English manners of the old house on the upper Thames.

"There is nothing more delightful in life than the meeting of old friends," said Geoffrey Lathkill in response to the sweet and gentle greeting of Mrs. White Marshall.

"Except the delight of making new ones," said Madeline, taking Adser into the embrace of her white arms, a picture that may well be permitted to close this romance of the unexpected.

THE END.

1. The first part of the document is a list of names and titles, including "The Hon. Mr. Justice" and "The Hon. Mr. Justice".





